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Gaddafi, portrait of the week by Bahgory 8

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Rocks fly

ISRAELI soldiers fired tear gas and rubber bullets at rock-throwing Palestinian youths in Hebron yesterday, in the fifth straight day of clashes in the West Bank city.

The Associated Press reported that some 50 Palestinians gathered in the West Bank city around 10am and began throwing stones and fire bombs. Israeli soldiers took up sniper positions on rooftops.

Nearly 100 Palestinians, including one 12-year-old boy who remains in a critical condition, have been wounded during the last four days of fighting, which came in protest against the three-month long stalemate in the peace process. There were no injuries reported during this latest outbreak of violence, which took place on the line dividing the Israeli- and Palestinian-controlled zones of the city, near Jewish settlements.

Palestinians have been demanding a halt to the settlement construction in Arab East Jerusalem and the West Bank as a condition for returning to the negotiating table. Israel has rejected the demands.

(see p.4)

Aid cut

$100 MILLION of US economic assistance previously given to Egypt and Israel will be redirected to a Middle East Peace and Stability Fund providing assistance to Jordan and, possibly, other countries actively involved in the peace process, reports **Aziza Sami**.

The amount will be deducted from US economic assistance earmarked for Egypt and Israel, worth $2.1 billion and $3 billion respectively.

"This fiscal year most of the transfer from Egypt's USAID programme will be covered by residual funds left in completed projects," said a US Embassy official. "No ongoing projects will be cut." He added that Egypt's $50 million annual transfer to the Fund represents little more than six per cent of the total $815 million provided annually.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said that Egypt welcomes any assistance given to Jordan "even if part of it has been re-allocated from Egypt."

(see p.7)

Cohen tour

ON THE final leg of a five-nation Gulf tour aimed at stressing his message of containment of Iran, US Defence Secretary William Cohen arrived in Oman on Tuesday, reported AFP.

The US, said Cohen, is committed to keeping its military forces in the region to protect the flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz and contain Iran and Iraq.

Cohen's Gulf tour comes in the wake of growing US concerns over Iran's allegedly "mounting threat" to US warships in the Gulf and to commercial shipping.

Before arriving in Oman, the US secretary paid similar visits to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.

Jezzine bomb

TWO LEBANESE civilians were killed Wednesday in a bomb explosion near Jezzine, a region in south Lebanon controlled by the Israeli-allied South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia, SLA sources told AFP.

The blast, which occurred while the two were driving in a car on a road near Jezzine, north of Israel's self-declared "security zone" in south Lebanon, was the second in two days. On Tuesday evening, two Lebanese civilians and a policeman were wounded in two separate bomb blasts in the same area, SLA and UN sources said.

While there was no immediate claim of responsibility for the blasts, Iranian-backed Hizbollah has often used roadside bombs to target Israeli troop patrols and allied militiamen, stated The AP.



GOLDEN FISH PACKS GOLD: Egypt's "Golden Fish" Rania Elwani, the country's only representative in the swimming event in the Mediterranean Games in Bari, Italy, became the first Egyptian swimmer to win three medals in an international swimming competition.

Elwani, who is 19, won two gold medals in the 100m and 50m freestyle events, in the process setting two new Mediterranean records. The young swimmer, whose performance in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics left Egyptians less-than-breathless, this time left her mark, breaking the 26 seconds mark in the 50m freestyle, with a time of 25.90 seconds. She also added to her collection of medals another silver, this one in the 200m freestyle event — a race she completed in 2.03:33 minutes. France's Solenne Figues took the gold in this event, with a time of 2.02:72 minutes.

Elwani, whose photo was plastered over the front pages of the sports magazines and newspapers published in Bari, will arrive in Cairo tonight to what promises to be a throng of fans and top Egyptian sports officials.

Also in Bari, Egypt's Tharwat El-Bendary snatched and jerked his way to two bronze medals in the 90kg weightlifting competition.

Leading the pack of countries participating in the Mediterranean Games, in terms of medals, is Italy, followed by Turkey and France.

Meanwhile, in a surprising upset in Egypt, Scotland's third-seeded Peter Nicol defeated seven-time World Champion Janshir Khan in the Second Al-Ahram International Squash Championship. *(For tournament coverage, see p. 21) (photo: AFP)*

The crisis mounts

Egypt's efforts to revive the Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations have yet to bear fruit. So what next? **Dina Ezzat** and **Khaled Dawoud** report

After four weeks and with few, if any, concrete results to report, Egypt's diplomatic initiative to encourage the resumption of stalemated negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis appears to be facing a crossroads.

"It must be made clear that the peace process is going through a major crisis," Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said on Tuesday. "Salvaging the process and putting it back on track, according to the original terms of reference, is an important responsibility."

Moussa spoke to reporters following a meeting chaired by President Hosni Mubarak and attended by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, the foreign minister and presidential adviser Osama El-Baz.

"We are now assessing the situation in light of the results," Moussa said.

Asked whether El-Baz would resume his shuttle diplomacy between Israel and the Palestinians soon, Moussa replied that this was "not on the agenda right now, although contacts will continue."

And yet, in an indication that efforts to revive the peace process have not been put completely on hold, Israeli negotiators Danny Naveh and Yitzhak Molkho were due to arrive in Cairo yesterday for consultations with Egyptian officials, according to AFP. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was in Saudi Arabia for talks with King Fahd.

El-Baz held separate meetings last Thursday with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem and Yasser Arafat in Ramallah, after which he reported that "further efforts are required." Arafat later dispatched his top negotiators, Saeb Ereikat and Hassan Asfour, to Cairo for talks with Moussa and El-Baz last Sunday and Monday.

Moussa said the main problem facing a resumption of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations was the issue of Jewish settlements, but refused to go into detail on the subject.

Senior official sources told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the principal obstacle that faced El-Baz on his shuttle trips was Israel's insistence on continuing its policy of building settlements, particularly in East Jerusalem. "The Israelis were not persuaded to stop," one source said. "The Palestinians know this and they have to decide what they want to do next."

A Palestinian source commented that "Netanyahu has closed the door for good." In the initial phase of the Egyptian initiative, the Palestinians were hoping that Netanyahu might agree to freeze construction for a few months to allow final status negotiations to begin, but now this hope has been eroded. "This man [Netanyahu] never wanted peace. He is not there for peace and he is just buying time," Farouk Kaddoumi, head of the PLO's political department, told the *Weekly*.

Particularly unhelpful to the Egyptian effort was Washington's flat refusal to put pressure on the Israelis. "Their declared stance is supportive of the Egyptian initiative, but they pointedly told an Egyptian envoy that Egypt needs to encourage the Palestinians to become more realistic and start the final status talks," said one source.

According to Egyptian and Palestinian sources, no matter how inclined the Palestinians are to jump-start the final status negotiations, they cannot do so in the current atmosphere of Israeli intransigence. "There have been decisions and recommendations by several Arab and regional organisations opposing settlements," said a source. "The Palestinians just can't throw this out of the window and decide to go back to the negotiating table unless Netanyahu offers them something."

Netanyahu, for his part, has repeatedly affirmed that the Palestinians have to "adjust expectations to reality."

"This is the kind of statement that makes things difficult," Moussa responded.

Egypt managed to get the Palestinians and Israelis to meet in Cairo two weeks ago. Although the initial results of the meeting were described as "promising," a hoped-for second meeting did not materialise.

Now the possibility of sending an Egyptian envoy for additional talks with the Palestinians and Israelis has been excluded. "Unless the Israelis are prepared to do something, there is no reason for an Egyptian envoy to be dispatched to Tel Aviv," maintained a source.

"The peace process is in serious crisis," Moussa asserted, adding that "the gap is still there and the building of settlements and the creation of *faits accomplis* in Jerusalem is adversely affecting the peace process."

Furthermore, Egyptians and Palestinians were disappointed by a US Congressional resolution, described by El-Baz as "not a good decision at all," recommending the transfer of the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and allocating $100 million for the move. For some diplomats, the resolution carried additional implications. According to one Egyptian diplomat "it is a fresh indication that the US is not going to get involved in a confrontation with the Israeli government over the future of the peace process."

Moussa recalled that President Mubarak had previously described the resolution as "unwise". It was, he said, in violation of pledges undertaken at the opening of the Madrid peace conference in 1991.

According to Moussa, salvaging the peace process will top the agenda of Mubarak's scheduled meeting today with French President Jacques Chirac in Paris. They will also discuss what France can do to revive the peace negotiations.

Moussa headed for Italy yesterday and is due to join Mubarak in Paris today. From Paris, Moussa will travel to London for talks with the British Labour government.

Moussa denied reports of a summit to be held in Cairo soon, grouping Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians.

Azam trial drags on

After five sessions the three-month trial of suspected Israeli spy Azam Azam threatens to drag on. **Khaled Dawoud** reports from the courtroom

The State Security Court appeared to be attempting to speed up the trial of suspected Israeli spy Azam Azam and his alleged Egyptian accomplice, Emad Ismail, defendants in one of the most publicised cases for years. But after holding three sessions in one week the court decided to postpone hearings until 19 July at the defence attorney's request.

Azam, an Israeli national of Druze origin, and Ismail were arrested in early November and charged with spying for Israel's intelligence service, the Mossad. The case also involves two Israeli women, also of Druze origin, who are believed to be in Israel and who were put on trial in absentia, accused of recruiting Ismail and using Azam as their liaison.

Coming at a time when Egyptian-Israeli relations had reached their lowest point since the signing of the 1979 peace treaty, the trial was always going to excite public interest. And at times during the proceedings, the Bab El-Khalq court in Islamic Cairo has resembled nothing so much as a battlefield, with hundreds of riot police and other branches of the security forces deployed to ensure security.

The already tight security had to be further strengthened when, earlier in the trial, Nasserist and Islamist lawyers became involved in scuffles with Azam's lawyer, Farid El-Deeb, diplomats from the Israeli Embassy and Israeli Druze leader and adviser to Netanyahu, Asaad Al-Asaad. Following the incident, only those in possession of a special court permit were allowed in the courtroom.

Although Egyptian law stipulates that every defendant is entitled to a lawyer and that if he or she were unable to hire one the court is obliged to appoint a defence lawyer at the state's expense, El-Deeb's decision to defend Azam has provoked an outcry among many of his colleagues. A group of lawyers, led by Mortada Mansour and Nabih El-Wahsh, urged the Bar Association to expel El-Deeb, while El-Wahsh asked Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi to strip El-Deeb of his Egyptian nationality for allegedly insulting the Egyptian people following the courtroom scuffle.



Mortada and El-Wahsh, whose vigil outside the courtroom has included the vigorous shouting of protests, were ordered to remain silent on Saturday by Chief Judge Moharam Darwish. Subsequent sessions have continued uninterrupted as police made it clear that any repeat of earlier disturbances would amount to a contempt of court.

Public interest in the trial has also been reflected in the press, and earlier in the week El-Deeb had petitioned the judge to take action against two journalists, Ahmed Moussa of *Al-Ahram* and Samir Ragab, editor-in-chief of *Al-Massa'i*, for allegedly attempting to influence the court through their writings. The court turned down El-Deeb's request.

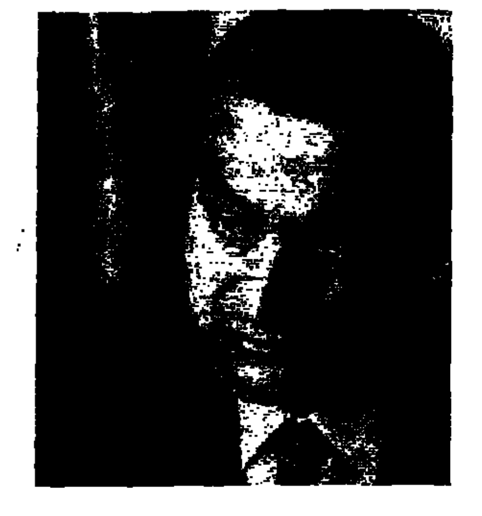
Yesterday, the prosecutor made his summing up. Azam and Ismail, both dressed in white prison uniforms and handcuffed to a policeman, appeared cheerful. The prosecution demanded 25 years hard labour for Ismail and provisional imprisonment with hard labour — between five and 15 years — for the three Israelis. Throughout the hearings Azam has protested his innocence, insisting he has never had any links with Mossad. He has consistently refused to speak to Egyptian reporters.

Azam's elder brother, Sami, Israeli diplomats and Netanyahu's advisor, Asaad Al-Asaad, have all expressed confidence in the "fairness and honesty of the Egyptian judiciary."

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An African agenda

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak said on Tuesday that Africans should be pleased with what they have achieved in the field of joint cooperation, but should also remember that a lot remains to be accomplished. In an address delivered on his behalf by Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif to a conference of the Information Ministers of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), *held* in Cairo this week, Mubarak cited among the positive achievements the OAU's decision to establish *a mechanism for settling inter-African* disputes.

Another achievement was declaring Africa a nuclear-free zone, Mubarak said. "The struggle of our peoples focused in the past on achieving and preserving the political independence of our states, but our task today is harder and more difficult. It is to search for solutions to the economic and social problems that obstruct Africa's action to achieve a better future for its peoples," Mubarak said.

He noted that "points of tension and political problems" continue to simmer in many parts of the continent and that additional efforts were needed to work out solutions through peaceful negotiations and respect for mutual interests. "Promoting Africa's development requires an effective and courageous confrontation of its chronic problems: desertification, drought, debts and refugees, which are problems for more than one African country," Mubarak said. "The required economic growth cannot be achieved except through rational and balanced policies of using resources and potential and building a comprehensive infrastructure."

Mubarak emphasised the importance of political and social stability as a prerequisite for integrated economic growth.

'Positive' Turkish role urged

FOREIGN Minister Amr Moussa has described Turkey's role in the region as "important" because Turkey is an influential country in the Middle East and an integral part of it.

Moussa explained that Egypt welcomes Turkey's involvement in the region's affairs provided it is positive. "We are not against Turkey's involvement as long as this role serves the peace process and stability in the region," he said.

Moussa went on to say that the recently announced joint Israeli-Turkish military manoeuvres, expected to be held by the end of this year, run counter to these goals. The same applies to Turkey's military incursion into northern Iraq for the purpose of eliminating the Kurdish separatists who have been attacking the Turkish army, he said.

Moussa asserted in remarks to reporters on Tuesday that although Egypt opposes terrorist attacks against Turkish civilians, "the reaction should not be at the expense of the territorial integrity of Iraq." He reported that he conveyed the Egyptian views to the Turkish leadership during his visit to Turkey this week when he attended the inauguration of the new Islamic economic grouping, known as Developing Eight or D-8.

Concerning Turkish-Israeli relations, Moussa commented that this was for the two countries to decide as long as the scope remains bilateral. "But if such relations would affect the situation in the region in terms of security and stability, or if initiating military cooperation was aimed at sending certain messages, in that case, we would say no because, then, matters would go beyond a point where we cannot remain silent," Moussa stated.

Moussa concluded that the situation in the Middle East cannot be stable except on the basis of a just peace and according to principles agreed upon by all parties. Thus, "any action that shakes these bases would *influence the future of the Middle East and* its stability."



photo: Mohamed Lutfi

The year in parliament

While the just-completed session of the People's Assembly drew praise from Speaker Fathi Sorour, independent and opposition analysts expressed reservations and misgivings. Gamal Essam El-Din reviews the year's harvest

Addressing the People's Assembly in its last session before the summer recess, Speaker Fathi Sorour spoke of "the harvest of a sincere parliamentary effort and genuine, serious action, worthy of the people's profound esteem." He was lavish in his praise of the Assembly's work in both its roles — as legislative authority and government watchdog — throughout the seven-month-long session.

In legislative terms, Sorour cited a long list of "unprecedented historical achievements aimed at contributing to the success of the current political and economic reform policies." He said the Assembly had passed 163 laws, compared with 231 in last year's session. *Of these, 125 dealt* with financial and budgetary matters, 21 covered economic affairs and 16 dealt with polit*ical and social questions. According to* Sorour, the large number of laws approved by the Assembly was clear evidence of the active participation of MPs from across the political spectrum.

But independent analysts and opposition deputies were not convinced. They charged that deputies have lost their legislative powers and that the *Assembly*, more often than not, *tows* the government line.

Yehia El-Gamal, a constitutional *law professor at Cairo University*, believes that the large number of laws passed was indicative of something else. "It shows that the Assembly's principal role is to support the government's policies, which are primarily targeted at liberalising the economy while restricting political action," he said.

According to El-Gamal, the Assembly had cooperated with the government in debating and approving as many as 21 economic laws, whereas only two political laws were passed, one of which provided for a three-year extension of the state of emergency.

"This not only underlines the paradoxical nature of the government's policies, which aim at freeing Egyptians economically while restricting them politically, but it also re-inforces the public impression that parliament does not act and take independent initiatives: it merely reacts to government policies," El-Gamal said.

He argued that the Assembly's achievements should not be evaluated by figures and statistics. "Rather, it is a matter of how much the Assembly contributed to democracy and freedom, how much it contributed to the decision-making process and how much it managed to project itself as a rival to the executive authority."

Ayman Nour of the liberal Wafd Party agreed that the Assembly had long ago surrendered most of its powers to the *government. In this, the current* Assembly's second session, he said, MPs had "as usual" steered away from debating draft bills submitted by MPs on the exercise of political powers and political party activities, despite the fact that legislating is MPs' constitutional prerogative. "This not only strips MPs of a supreme right, but it also erodes the right of Egyptians to achieve greater political freedoms through parliament," he added.

According to Nour, the outcome of voting in the house did not usually reflect the true opinions of MPs. He cited six US aid agreements, which were approved at "supersonic speed" before the recess, although they had come under fire from majority and opposition MPs alike. "This shows that the majority of MPs voted for the agreements, contrary to their own personal convictions, because they felt that what the government wants approved should be approved," he said.

Abdel-Moneim El-Oleimi, an independent from the Nile Delta town of Tanta, also complained that MPs had been stripped of their role as legislators. He said that despite Sorour's boast that 12 bills proposed by deputies had been debated by the Assembly's Proposals and Complaints Committee, "the fact remains that this small figure attests to how deputies are denied any effective legislative role." El-Oleimi himself has submitted *as many as 33 bills during the last sev*en parliamentary sessions. The Proposals and Complaints Committee began debating them as far back as 1993, but none of them are expected to reach the plenary Assembly, let alone gain its approval.

According to Nour, the Assembly *has started using a new tactic to ensure* that bills proposed by MPs are shelved. The discussion of a proposed *law submitted by an MP is delayed by* the Proposals and Complaints Committee until a rival bill on the same subject is prepared by the government, he said. The two drafts are then submitted together to the Assembly. "The result is a foregone conclusion: the majority will vote for the government draft," Nour said.

Abdel-Ahad Gamaleddin, chairman of the Proposals and Complaints Committee, rejected the charge. "The committee is not the monopoly of some MPs. We study the bills submitted by MPs carefully, refer them to other specialised committees and, in the end, it is the Assembly that has the final say," Gamaleddin said.

In its just-concluded session, the Assembly approved one draft law out of the 12 submitted by MPs and discussed by the committee. The bill had originally been submitted by Mohamed Abul-Einein, *an appointed MP* and prominent businessman, and the resulting law provides harsher penalties for the illegal transplant of human organs.

Sorour also claimed that the Assembly had been successful in its role as an objective and unbiased watchdog of government actions. "This was achieved by giving deputies the right to submit as many as 137 questions and 164 requests for information to government ministers, compared to 179 and 93 respectively in the *1996-97 session. Moreover, deputies directed* six interpellations [questions that must be answered] to ministers, compared to four in the previous session," Sorour said. He added that members of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) were responsible for most of these questions.

But for El-Gamal, the fact remains that the number of questions and re*quests for information is not in pro*portion to the large number of NDP deputies. "Moreover, they never submit interpellations, but even tend to defend cabinet ministers against the interpellations directed by the opposition," El-Gamal said.

Ahmed Taha, an independent with leftist leanings, complained that cabinet ministers rarely respond adequately to questions and requests for information. And requests for a special debate on a certain question are usual*ly turned down, he said. As an* example, Taha said, Sorour turned down a request submitted by 20 independent and Wafd deputies, for a special debate on the alleged rigging of local council elections.

Failed candidate wins compensation

A Cairo court has awarded compensation to a failed *parliamentary candidate*, thus reviving an old controversy over parliament's authority and the integrity of elections. Gamal Essam El-Din and Shaden Shehab report

Salama

A year and a half after the 1995 general elections, the Southern Cairo Court has ordered the Interior Ministry to pay LE25,000 to Ali Salama, assistant secretary-general of the liberal Wafd Party, and a losing candidate in the elections.

In what could be a ground-breaking ruling, the court upheld an earlier decision by the Court of *Cassation, which accepted Salama's allegations* of rigging in his Al-Hawamdiya, Giza, constituency, in favour of his ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) rival.

Salama filed the second lawsuit, demanding compensation, after the People's Assembly failed to admit him as an MP despite a ruling in his favour by the Court of Cassation.

Salama, 80, was one of over 900 failed candidates who filed lawsuits with the Court of Cassation, which is authorised by the Constitution to investigate the results of parliamentary elections. The court found that the election of as many as 200 deputies was invalid.

But Assembly Speaker Fathi Sorour ignored the court's findings, on the grounds that parliament has the final say on the validity of any MP's membership under the Constitution. He contended that the Court of Cassation is only authorised to investigate the election results and then send its findings to the Assembly, which is then entitled to accept or reject the findings with *a two-thirds majority.*

However, last Thursday's decision by the Southern Cairo Court could open the door for similar compensation claims on the part of other failed candidates whose cases have been deemed valid by the Court of Cassation. Because the court has declared the membership of more than 200 deputies null and void, compensation awarded could amount to millions of pounds.

The Southern Cairo Court stated that the elections *in Hawamdiya* on 6 December 1995 had been rigged in a variety of ways: security forces had surrounded the polling stations to bar voters from casting their ballots and prevent Salama's representatives from monitoring the vote; polling station supervisors had filled out ballot cards in favour of Salama's rival. In addition, when infuriated voters attacked the supervisors, they called in the police, who transferred the ballot boxes to a different location before voting time had expired, the court said. The court also accepted the Court of Cassation's findings showing *that some voters had voted more than once and* that others had cast ballots in the names of dead voters who had not been removed from the list.

"This is a great victory," Salama told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. He vowed to file a third lawsuit, demanding that the compensation be increased. "The amount of compensation should be commensurate with what I spent during the election campaign," he said.

He also pledged to file a fourth lawsuit with an administrative court, contesting the legality of the NDP candidate's election on the grounds that he had run for election in the worker's seat. At least half the seats in the Assembly must be held by 'workers and peasants', while the rest are allocated to 'professionals'.

Justice Yehia El-Rifai, ex-chairman of the Judges' Club, said that "court orders against members of parliament will continue to be made and then ignored." *He believes* that a solution to the problem lies in the reform of the electoral system.

"It is a shame that the compensation money will come from the state coffers, which means that the price will be paid by ordinary citizens," Rifai commented.

Fawzia Abdel-Sattar, ex-chairwoman of the Assembly's Legislative Committee, defended the constitutional right of the Assembly to accept or reject the Court of Cassation's findings. The Court of Cassation has no constitutional authority to invalidate the membership of any deputy, *she said. For this to happen*, the approval of the Assembly's two-thirds majority is required. However, she conceded that the compensation money must be paid.

Street thugs face zero tolerance

The Interior Ministry is clamping down on street thugs and is preparing new legislation to deal with the mushrooming phenomenon. Jailan Halawi investigates

While new legislation is being drawn up to deal with the escalating problem of street thuggery (*baltaga*), the Interior Ministry has invoked the emergency law and ordered the detention of 120 alleged offenders without trial.

Major General Nabil El-Ezabi, assistant to the Interior Minister, said the thugs (usually defined as people who use violence and often weapons to threaten or mug others) had been rounded up over the past four weeks because they posed a threat to law and order as well as to other citizens' rights to a secure life.

The emergency law, which has been in force since President Anwar El-Sadat's assassination in 1981, empowers security forces to detain suspects without trial for long periods. Previously, Interior Ministry officials had vowed that the law would only be invoked against terrorists and drug-traffickers.

El-Ezabi said he was commissioned by Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi to declare war on street thugs after he was *chosen to head the ministry's public* security department two months ago. There is no legal text defining an act of thuggery, he said, but the general understanding is that it refers to an act which underminings public security, terrorising other citizens and depriving them of their constitutional right to a secure life.

To fill this legal loophole, the ministry is preparing new legislation, including a series of precautionary measures to help prevent such street violence, El-Ezabi said. These include the penalties of *house-arrest, imprisonment for* long periods, or banishment of the thug back to his hometown.

The ministry, he added, is also acting to amend the weapons and ammunition law, providing harsher penalties for carrying or using unlicensed *weapons amidst a gathering of people or on pub*lic transport. The law would also prohibit the use of knives, daggers and swords for illegal purposes as well as the self-defence spray which thugs began using to temporarily paralyse their victims.

Declaring that his slogan is "to pre-empt crime," *El-Ezabi said the* war against thuggery began in Ramses Square — one of the most crowded in Cairo. Policemen began patrolling the square on foot and it is now combed on a daily basis. The assistance of juvenile police, the vice squad and transport police was also enlisted, he said.

Other potential trouble spots are mainly shanty towns and working-class neighbourhoods, where thugs usually gather in "suspect" coffee-shops and taverns, El-Ezabi said.

According to statistics released by the Interior Ministry, 987 firearms and 10,371 knives and swords were seized and 59 knife-manufacturing workshops were shut down over the past four weeks. Also 172 gangs were apprehended, which included 365 suspects who confessed to committing 369 acts of street crime.

For psychiatrist Mohamed Shaalan, the mushrooming of thuggery is "the natural outcome of the economic changes that took place in our society." Pointing out that several people had accumulated large fortunes illegally, which he described as high-class thuggery, Shaalan said the "poor are emulating the rich. But since the ruffians cannot touch the wealthier class, they can only exercise thuggery against poor people, who are weaker than themselves," he said.

Sociologist Ali Fahmi said that thuggery, although lacking a legal definition, usually refers *to the acts of unemployed men who* resort to violence, and possibly the use of weaponry, to force money from others illegally.

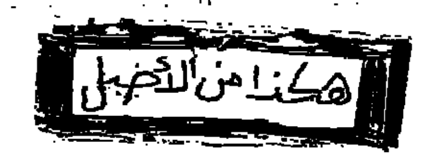
The phenomenon is widespread in cities but not in rural areas where strong family ties prevent its appearance. "Whenever unemployment and scarce job opportunities prevail, and income is on the decline, thuggery spreads, particularly among men with strong bodies and small minds," he said.

Another factor that compounds the problem is the availability of unlicensed weapons, he said. And a third reason for the increase is "lax*ity in implementing the law* as well as the legal loopholes that make it possible for ruffians to get away *with their crimes," he said.*

Fahmi warned that the thugs' crimes could become more serious if they were hired by underground tycoons, such as drug and arms traffickers, to act against their rivals.

Thugs tend to live in shanty towns around the capital. "These areas teem with criminals, while security forces are largely absent, thus providing a safe haven for thugs," said Fahmi.

Action by the government to stamp out the phenomenon was welcomed by Fahmi who also called for harsher penalties. "Although I oppose the emergency law, I believe that it should be invoked in the war against thuggery," he said.



A multimedia dream come true

Mrs Suzanne Mubarak has opened a state-of-the-art cultural centre introducing children to the world of cyberspace

The Integrated Care Society, founded in 1977 under the chairmanship of Mrs Suzanne Mubarak, has two goals: to introduce children to cultural and educational activities through various programmes; and to create a think-tank aimed at formulating strategies to raise children's cultural awareness.

Now the society is using modern media to stimulate children's cultural and educational development, in a programme which aims to take the nation's children into the 21st century. The programme, organisers say, will pioneer a quantitative move into the world of multimedia in Egypt and the Arab world.

The society's brand new, ultra-modern, multi-storey building opened by Mrs Mubarak in Heliopolis last week — which itself looks like a beacon to the future — is the first in Egypt to offer a collection of multimedia items in Arabic and English. It is destined to cater principally to children from six to 15 and includes several libraries for this age group, a multimedia library, and a cultural discovery hall where children will learn about world cultures through books, ethnic costumes and displays of arts and crafts provided by different embassies in Egypt. The jewel in the centre's crown, however, is undoubtedly the state-of-the-art computer hall where the children will be introduced to the world of cyberspace and taught the many uses of the Internet.



Mrs Suzanne Mubarak inaugurates Egypt's first multi-media centre for children. The Centre was founded by the Integrated Care Society, chaired by Mrs Mubarak

To achieve its second goal, the society has created the first think-tank for cultural awareness, which will work in tandem with the new book centre. The centre offers a comprehensive library of Egyptian children's books, a professional staff on call to answer questions on the books, authors and illustrations, reference services by telephone, fax, mail, e-mail and the Web, the assessment and review of existing books and multimedia tools, and the organisation of workshops, seminars, conferences and similar activities. The cultural centre also houses the Egyptian chapter of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY).

Furthermore, new multimedia products will be developed by the centre in Arabic, in a form compatible with Egyptian traditions.

"What should be of concern to us in the coming few years is to make preparations for entering the 21st century, to prepare our young generations for the challenges of the future," Mrs Mubarak said in her inauguration speech.

She described the opening of the centre as a "dream come true" and a new achievement on the part of the Integrated Care Society. "Our main target is to encourage reading among our children and our big dream is that low-price books reach the largest possible number of children," Mrs Mubarak said.

The cultural centre, she added, offers a comprehensive collection of cultural activities to children, opening "a new exciting world of multimedia communications" for them. "For the first time, we have succeeded in establishing direct communication between Egyptian children and those in other parts of the world through computer programmes, in which little Horus will accompany the world's children to the magic world of Egyptian children, where Pharaonic history is mixed with stories about our traditions."

The cultural hall, Mrs Mubarak said, "is the meeting-point of cultures and civilisations, a permanent exhibition where foreign embassies will present cultural performances, making it possible for our children to have a wider perception of other cultures."

Reported by ***Rania Khallaf***

Mixed rights record in 1996

According to the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights, violence between militants and the security forces declined in 1996. But human rights continued to be compromised by the emergency law. Amira Howeidy reviews the EOHR's annual report

Clashes between security forces and armed Islamist groups "relatively decreased" in 1996, and there were also "some positive developments" in terms of human rights standards, according to the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR). The Organisation's report for 1996 said that violent acts resulted in the death of 174 people last year, compared to 373 in 1995 — a drop of 53.36 per cent.

But, added the 93-page report, human rights continued to suffer as a result of the "government's persistence in monopolising political activity" and the enforcement of the emergency law for the 16th consecutive year.

According to the report, 1996 witnessed the premeditated killing by Islamist militants of 25 people for allegedly cooperating with the police and 19 Copts. Eighteen people who were merely bystanders to acts of terrorism also died. The report provided the following breakdown of the death toll for 1996: 53 policemen, 34 Islamist militants, 69 other citizens and 18 tourists.

The security forces undertook continuous operations against militant strongholds, resulting in the arrest of many militant leaders, the report said. But despite the relative success of the security forces in minimising the activities of the armed Islamist groups by these means, the militants continued to take the initiative. They continued to kill policemen, particularly non-commissioned officers, guards and undercover agents, "with the aim of taking revenge on the state and to undermine its image or to kill undercover agents who provide the security forces with information on the [militant] groups," the EOHR said.

The EOHR continued to monitor the arbitrary detention or random arrest of "hundreds of civilians" on suspicion of belonging to illegal groups, which occurred after every act of violence. Recurrent detention "which remains at the top of the EOHR's concerns" also continued, the group alleged.

The EOHR report claimed that the torture and maltreatment of prisoners remained "the worst aspect" of the human rights situation in Egypt — an allegation which is strongly denied by Egyptian security officials.

In the field of legislation, the report said that six legal amendments governing civil rights approved by the People's Assembly were generally positive, but nevertheless contained "some shortcomings" that detracted from the rights and freedoms provided and protected by the Constitution.

The laws in question are Law Three, regulating the filing of *hesba* — the right of any Muslim to initiate legal action against another whom he regards as undermining Islamic interests — lawsuits, Law 81 which amended Article Three of the Code of Civil Procedure, Law 12 on child protection, Law 84 amending some provisions of the local administration law, Law 95 amending some provisions of the Penal Code on publication offences and Law 96 on press activities.

The EOHR described the law regulating *hesba* lawsuits as a "commendable step," but said it was not enough to stop the harassment of writers, intellectuals and artists. The law confines the power to file lawsuits based on *hesba* to the Public Prosecution Department. "This bars individuals from taking *hesba* lawsuits directly to the courts. It simply moves the battleground from the courts to the corridors of the public prosecution offices," said Mohamed Mounib, the EOHR's secretary-general.

Article Three of the Code of Civil Procedure had to be amended since the *hesba* law did not cover lawsuits already being heard by courts at the time it was passed. The amendment stated that no claim or rebuttal based on this law, or any other law, might be accepted unless the claimant had a direct interest. It also stipulated that the amendment was applicable to all lawsuits and challenges currently being heard by the courts.

Another law that was amended but remained a cause for concern for "threatening freedom of expression" was the modified press law, the EOHR said. The amendments fell short of what human rights activists had demanded because they continued to impose prison sentences for opinion and publication offences. The same applied to Penal Code provisions relevant to opinion and publication offences which stipulate prison sentences of up to five years, the report said.

An official source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that the report was a reflection of the EOHR's insistence on criticising the government. "It is obvious that the EOHR is always searching for, and focusing on, the negative aspects, while downplaying positive legislative and administrative developments," the source said.

Most of the issues mentioned in the report had been raised before, the source added, but this time "one can spot several legal mistakes."

One of those mistakes is citing the name of Libyan opposition activist Mansour El-Khekhya, whom the report listed among 12 cases of "involuntary disappearance" between 1992 and 1996. "The disappearance of El-Khekhya is a political case that has nothing to do with the Egyptian government," the source said.

The source also took issue with the report for referring to the Islamist militants as "armed Islamist groups."

"They are terrorist groups, not simply 'armed groups': this is a phrase applied in a civil war scenario, and we are not in a civil war," the source said.

The source also rejected the report's claim that cases of "administrative" and "recurrent" arrests have continued over the past five years. "No one in Egypt is arrested without specific accusations or reasons," the source insisted.

Naila Gabr, head of the Human Rights Department at the Foreign Ministry, noted that although the EOHR does not have legal status, "it is nevertheless active and working, drafting reports, meeting people, holding seminars and workshops. In short, they are enjoying freedom of expression, which is a positive sign that shows the Egyptian government's tolerance and total respect for human rights."

Creativity besieged

The climate of religious conservatism is putting intellectuals and artists under increasing pressure, warned a human rights group this week. Dina Ezzat reports

Islamist conservatism is posing an escalating threat to freedom of expression and artistic creativity, said a communiqué issued last week by Cairo-based the Legal Research and Resource Centre for Human Rights.

One danger was the lawsuits filed under the allegedly Islamic doctrine of *hesba*, which empowers any Muslim to sue another for allegedly tarnishing the image of Islam. Another danger was the censorship and prohibition of books and films at the recommendation of Al-Azhar's Islamic Research Academy and the Front of Al-Azhar *Ulema* (scholars). As a result, the Centre said, "intellectuals and artists were constantly subjected to the sword," that could either suppress their works or subject them personally to various forms of punishment, including imprisonment, or make their lives an obvious target for fanatical militants.

"It has been very alarming. Over the last two years, intellectuals were the target of a fierce campaign that aimed to deny them their basic constitutional right of exercising their freedoms," argued Osama Khalil, editor of the six-page report. Journalists, writers and film-makers came up for attack in past years, Khalil said, and this year has not been much better.

In the years 1995-1996, the report listed 18 lawsuits that were filed against intellectuals, seven books and a film that were banned plus another film that was prohibited after its initial showing in several cinemas. The latter, Youssef Chahine's *The Emigrant*, caused much controversy after some Muslim theologians complained to courts that it depicted the life of Joseph, whom Muslims revere as a prophet. The theologians further won a court order divorcing Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid, a professor of Arabic linguistics, whom they claimed was an apostate, from his wife, Ibtihal Younis, also a Cairo University professor.

The report cited eight "attacks" on the freedom of expression in the first six months of 1997. These included the censoring of the novel *El-Saqqar* (The Falcon Trainer), a reported recommendation by Al-Azhar's Islamic Research Academy to ban as many as 50 books, Khalil said, and the removal of nude paintings by the renowned artist Mohamed Said from the literary magazine *Ibda'a* (Creativity).

Human rights circles charge that freedom of expression is in obvious jeopardy. They concede that although it is true that the state has acted to amend the *hesba* law to make the processing of *hesba* lawsuits conditional on the approval of the public prosecution department, its efforts have fallen short of completely "shutting the door" against such cases.

For some, what is most alarming is the self-imposed censorship exercised by publishing houses to make sure that they steer away from trouble.

Wafiq El-Faramawi, a young short story writer, said his latest collection, *Roh El-Roh* (The Heart of the Soul), was printed but was not made available on the market because the distributor, the General Egyptian Book Organisation (GEBO), felt "uncertain" about a few sentences that describe the human body. "While flipping through the book, someone must have thought that some sentences could cause trouble with theologians, so he decided it was best to play it safe," claimed El-Faramawi.

His collection revolves around a child growing up in a shanty town and his initiation into adolescence. It is only natural that this boy starts to observe the human body, El-Faramawi said.

A GEBO insider said that what may seem "natural" to writers could cause problems to the publishing house, which was already in trouble for the nude paintings that were to appear in *Ibda'a* magazine. "The chairman wants to print new and interesting books, but he doesn't want to get into undeserved trouble," the source said.

"This is the core of the problem," said Khalil. "The work of artists should be judged on the basis of its artistic merit, and on that basis alone."

To promote this attitude and counter the anti-freedom spirit, the Centre's report suggested the creation of a task force made up of members of the Egyptian Writers Union and the Press Syndicate to provide moral support for all intellectuals subjected to persecution that undermines their exercise of freedom of expression. This task force should also put out a monthly publication providing full details of all the violations of freedom of expression, to make sure that they get due attention and, hopefully, action by the state.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Anger sweeps the territories

PALESTINIAN anger at the deadlock in Israeli-Palestinian talks, the US Congress recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and the continued Israeli confiscation of Palestinian lands, have led to waves of violence and protests in Hebron, Gaza and Jerusalem over the past week.

Hebron was the scene of daily clashes between angry Palestinans and Israeli troops since Saturday, when Palestinian youths threw stones at an Israeli army checkpoint. Soldiers fired back with rubber bullets and tear gas, injuring over 30 of the 300 Palestinans involved in the melee.

The clashes were described as the worst unrest in the city since March, when three Palestinians were killed while protesting against Israel's decision to construct a new settlement in East Jerusalem. The decision led to the suspension of Arab-Israeli peace talks. Palestinans have said they will not resume the talks until the construction stops.

On Tuesday, 15 Palestinians were injured in Hebron, three seriously. Palestinian doctors set up a makeshift hospital — a tent, a bed and basic medical equipment — near the scene of the clashes.

In the Gaza strip, clashes broke out on Monday when about 30 Palestinans tried to tear down a fence near the Gush Katif settlement, saying it was built as part of an illegal land grab by the Israelis. On Tuesday, some 100 Palestinians staged a sit-in outside the Jewish settlement. Israeli soldiers took up positions in the sand dunes and fired tear gas at the Palestinans.

In Jerusalem, several dozen Palestinians staged a protest outside the US consulate on Monday. The protesters wanted to hand a letter to US diplomats saying that US interests in the Middle East would be hurt because of Washington's bias. The consulate guard refused to let them deliver the message.





Israeli soldiers arrest a Palestinian youth in the West Bank town of Hebron *(photos: Reuters & AFP)*



A slap in the face

A US House of Representatives resolution recognising Jerusalem as Israel's undivided capital left Arabs wondering if the representatives had taken leave of their senses. Hoda Tawfik writes from Washington

A US House of Representatives resolution passed this week, affirming that "Jerusalem should remain Israel's united and undivided capital," has left both Arabs and Arab American reeling from what was seen as a slap in the face to all Arabs, Muslims and Christians.

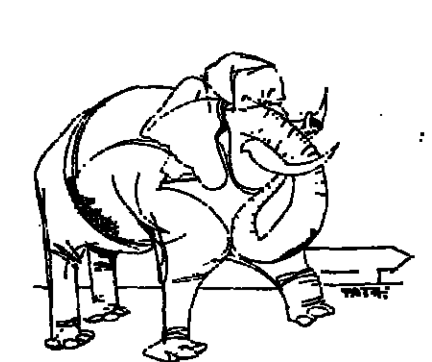
The concurrent resolution passed with an overwhelming majority of 406-17, not only recognised Jerusalem as Israel's undivided capital, but also called on President Bill Clinton to publicly reaffirm this stand as part of the country's official policy. The resolution also allocates $100 million to move the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem by 1999.

Arab Americans, who have been lobbying Congress to increase pressure on Israel to comply with the Oslo Accords, were flabbergasted by the House's initiative. Similarly, all Arab governments this week issued statements condemning what the House labelled as a message of "congratulations to the residents of Jerusalem and the peoples of Israel on the 30th anniversary of the re-unification of the historic city."

This statement garnered no rave reviews on the part of Arab Americans. "What is even worse and disgusting and enraging is the irresponsible debate by the House of Representatives, which accompanied its vote on this resolution," stated Khalil Jahshan, president of the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA).

Jahshan's comments came in reference to assertions made in the introduction of the resolution, which said that "there has been a continuous Jewish presence in Jerusalem for three millennia, and a Jewish majority in the city since the 1840s."

While the Clinton administration is not legally bound to the resolution, its timing, coupled with the tenuous circumstances



surrounding the peace process, was viewed by Arabs as a surprisingly irresponsible move. The present administration has, on its part, repeatedly opposed recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and has agreed to keep its embassy in Tel Aviv.

The House's move, however, has served to cast even more doubts on Clinton's role as the main sponsor of the peace process. Supporting this argument, critics have pointed to the fact that the US president has repeatedly backed down from pressuring Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu into easing his hardline stance towards peace.

With this in mind, administration officials have been cautious when talking about the new resolution. "Our policy is clear. It has not changed," said Nicholas Burns, the State Department's spokesman. "It is important that the United States does not take preemptive measures that might complicate issues pertaining to Jerusalem."

And within the Congress' lower house, some voices of reason aired their opposition to the resolution. Congressman Lee Hamilton told a throng of clapping supporters that "the intent of this legislation is to force the administration to recognise Jerusalem as part of the territory of the State of Israel and, indeed, as the capital of the State of Israel."

"This resolution does not state American policy in the Middle East," he continued. "When members vote for this resolution, they are departing from the US position on the Middle East peace process."

Changing fortunes

The absence of the militant Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria's parliamentary elections boosted the fortunes of Islamist parties willing to cooperate with the government. Amira Howeidy reports from Algiers

A few hours before the 5 June poll was over, the flamboyant leader of Hamas, now the Movement for a Peaceful Society (MPS), Mahfouz Nehnah complained of what he called flagrant violations in the balloting process. But once the final official results were announced, giving MPS and its ally the Islamic Al-Nahda Party a total of 103 seats out of the parliament's 380, Nehnah changed his tone.

In a press conference held earlier this week, Nehnah expressed readiness to join a "national unity coalition government," including the pro-Algerian President Liamine Zeroual's National Democratic Rally (RND) which won 155 seats. President Zeroual has secured a majority in parliament through his alliance with the former ruling National Liberation Front (FLN), which won 64 seats. Strictly speaking, Zeroual does not need an alliance with the MPS.

Nehnah's change of tack came as no surprise to many observers. The charismatic Islamist university professor and former member of Al-Nahda Party owes at least part of his political success to his ability to forge timely alliances as he went along.

The absence of the popular but banned FIS from the political scene following the arrest of its leaders and many of its supporters in 1992 has left a void in the country's political arena, which other Islamist parties were only glad to fill.

The FIS achieved a landslide victory in the 1991 local council elections as well as the first round of parliamentary elections and was poised to win the second round when the Algerian army intervened and scrapped the elections. The subsequent war of terror has left between 30,000 and 100,000 dead, depending on whether you believe the government or the Islamist opposition.

Despite its absence, the FIS remained an influential factor in last week's elections. Back in the first round of 1991, the FIS garnered over 3.2 million votes. This pro-FIS vote could be responsible for at least a part of the 2.5 million votes that went to the MPS and Al-Nahda in the recent elections. "It remains to be seen whether the MPS or Al-Nahda will replace the FIS," commented one Arab diplomat in Algiers.

Many in Algeria believe that the victory of the MPS and Al-Nahda was achieved on behalf of the FIS. Some even accuse Nehnah and Al-Nahda leader Abdallah Gaballah of indirectly taking part in the government's war against the FIS. It is often pointed out that Nehnah's popularity as an Islamist figure grew only after the FIS leaders were imprisoned and as his relations with the regime improved.

Nehnah's critics point to his decision to run in the 1995 presidential elections. Nehnah, they say, was aware of the fact that he could not win the elections, but only took part in order to give legitimacy to Zeroual, and to boost his own stature in the process. Nehnah came second to Zeroual, winning nearly 25 per cent of the vote. This reasonable showing suggests that he is Algeria's second man and, arguably, a safe bet for the Islamist vote in the absence of the FIS.

Back in 1991, both Nehnah and Gaballah failed to win seats in the parliament. Now, they lead the second largest bloc in the Algerian parliament and command the sole channel for legitimate Islamist political activity in the nation.

Where does all this leave the FIS? Moustafa Bouchachi, the lawyer defending the imprisoned FIS leaders, believes that since many of those leaders have served almost half of their sentences by now, it is possible that they would be released soon.

Amir Taheri, an expert on Algerian affairs agrees. "The FIS poses very little threat to the regime, and the Algerian government could seriously consider releasing them," he told the *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "FIS [members] are not all in prison. Some are abroad, some are in Algeria, many others are now members of existing political parties. They are still, by and large, strongly present," Taheri said.

Taheri revealed that a number of FIS members are preparing for the establishment of a new party under a different name and with a platform that complies with the new electoral law. "They are getting ready for the local council elections which they hope to contest through the new party." But will the military-backed regime accept this? "If they comply with the new laws, and if they are sincere, why not?" said Taheri.

Cautious rapprochement

Recent exchanges of visits between unofficial Syrian and Iraqi business delegations represent more than mere trade transactions, reports Sherine Bahaa

In an apparent thaw in their relations, Syria announced this week the opening of three crossing points in its long-closed border with Iraq. The announcement coincided with a visit by an Iraqi business delegation to Damascus, returning a visit to Baghdad in May by a Syrian team.

No big deal? Not where relations between Syria and Iraq are concerned. The two countries, ruled by rival wings of the Arab nationalist Baath Party, broke off ties 17 years ago when Syria backed Iran in its long war against Iraq. Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein have also overstepped all diplomatic bounds in expressing their dislike of each other. Syria, moreover, was part of the US-led military alliance which in 1991 went to war against Iraq to end its occupation of Kuwait.

Recent developments in the region seem to have prompted the two historic foes into thinking that rapprochement might be a better option than maintaining animosities. These developments include Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's hardline policies, the growing military cooperation between Turkey and Israel and Turkey's continuous incursions into northern Iraq in pursuit of militants of the Kurdish Workers Party.

Visiting Iraqi and Syrian business delegations insisted that they were only discussing trade deals and that politics were left to the leadership of the two countries. However, a spokesman for the Syrian business delegation conceded that the visit also had "a range of political implications." The warm Syrian welcome extended to the Iraqi delegation the minute it crossed the long-deserted border crossing point of Tanaf was another sign of the new direction in which relations were heading between the two countries.

A spokesman for the Syrian business delegation stated that the two sides were discussing a range of trade deals worth $20 million, mainly for foodstuffs and medicine. A group of Iraqi businessmen have also visited Syria's Mediterranean ports to determine the possibility of using them to process goods bound for Iraq, a shorter transit route than Aqaba in southern Jordan on which Baghdad relies for most of its supplies.

Meanwhile, Syrian and Iraqi officials confirmed that all their trade exchanges would be within the framework of Iraq's oil-for-food deal with the United Nations. The deal, which was renewed recently, allows Iraq to export oil worth $2 billion for six months to buy food and medicine.

"One of the great ironies of the Arab world is that rapprochement between two neighbouring states becomes a matter of analysis," said Sebaie Mohamed El-Sebaie, director of the Oriental Studies Centre at Cairo University. El-Sebaie noted several regional developments which have led to the improvement of ties between Syria and Iraq. Now that the Iraq-Iran relationship has eased to the degree that Iran has invited Saddam Hussein to the Organisation of the Islamic Conference summit to be held in Tehran in December, Syria's move towards reopening its border with Iraq came as no surprise to its Iranian allies. "It is a clear attempt to establish a Syrian, Iraqi and Iranian alliance to stand against the Turkish-Israeli-American front," said El-Sebaie.

Damascus has repeatedly declared its opposition to the indefinite renewal of the UN sanctions imposed on Baghdad following its occupation of Kuwait in 1990. It has also strongly condemned Turkey's incursion into northern Iraq and defended Iraq's territorial integrity.

Such stands have had a positive effect on the ties between the two countries. Saad Qassem Hammoudi, chairman of the Arab and International Relations Committee of Iraq's parliament, said that "normalisation between Syria and Iraq is a necessity, not only in the commercial and economic fields but because of the challenges facing the two brother countries."

Ghassan Attia, a London-based Iraqi political analyst, says that both Syria and Iraq were in a critical situation that pushed them towards rapprochement. "Syria is cold-shouldered by the US and sidelined by the Likud government. Even the Gulf states are unwilling to risk the anger of the US for the sake of Syria," said Attia.

Under Assad, Damascus has mastered what Western diplomats call the "diplomacy of signals". While Baghdad opts for political normalisation or even a Syrian-Iraqi-Iranian alliance, Damascus has been more cautious and has not broken all links with the US. Washington would not look kindly on improvements in ties between Syria and Iraq at a time when American officials have stated openly that they are seeking to further isolate and topple Saddam Hussein.

Western diplomats also believe that the skillful and cautious President Assad will follow a wait-and-see policy. This entails taking one step and then waiting for regional and international reactions to decide what to do next.

"They are calling it rapprochement between the Iraqi and Syrian people. This is in itself one of the ways by which the Syrians are minimising various responses," said El-Sebaie.

Lebanon hails UN vote

Lebanon declared victory when the UN General Assembly endorsed a resolution blaming Israel for the Qana refugee camp massacre despite American pressure. Zeina Khodr reports from Beirut

In its meeting last week, the United Nations General Assembly not only condemned Israel for its 1996 bombing of the UN refugee camp in Qana but also ordered the Israeli government to pay $1.7 million in damages to the UN peacekeeping troops in south Lebanon known as UNIFIL.

The majority vote ratified an unprecedented motion put forward by Arab, Muslim and non-aligned members of the assembly. It called upon Israel to finance the budget of UNIFIL because of its responsibility for the Qana massacre in which 107 civilians, mostly women and children, were killed.

One hundred and twenty-seven states voted in favour of the resolution while Israel and the United States voted against. The five permanent members of the Security Council have no veto power in the General Assembly. Russia abstained on grounds that political considerations were not appropriate for a resolution which mainly aims at providing funding for the UNIFIL.

Lebanon stood firm against attempts by Washington to obstruct the resolution, including a threat to block the renewal of UNIFIL's mandate when it comes up for ratification by the Security Council next month. "This is a victory in the UN's battle to maintain its credibility," said Lebanese Foreign Minister Fares Bouez. "The vote is in Lebanon's favour. It proved the world body's ability to face pressure," he added.

Shortly before the adoption of the resolution by the General Assembly's so-called Fifth Committee, US delegate to the UN Linda Sehenwick said that "the draft's adoption would make it hard for Israel and the US to support the force and it would also make it difficult for the US to approve the extension of UNIFIL's mandate."

The reported threat was denied by American Ambassador to Lebanon Richard Jones. He stated that Washington's position was not hostile to Lebanon and that his administration had other reasons for voting against the resolution. "We reject the resolution because the General Assembly exceeds its authority by supporting the motion. From our point of view, the UNIFIL, as a peacekeeping operation, falls under the control of the Security Council," Jones explained. He added that in putting forward the resolution the General Assembly "was in effect telling the Security Council how to run its business" and that it set a precedent whereby a single state was asked to fund a particular UN operation. "That has never happened in the UN's history," he said.

Bouez, who denied that the US threatened his country, rejected the American justifications for voting against the resolution. He said the resolution was both financial and political. "It does not have any military or security aspect. But you cannot expect Lebanon to withdraw the draft since that would extricate Israel from the horrible crime it committed," he said in reference to Qana.

Bouez added that his country turned down an American compromise offer shortly before the resolution was adopted. The compromise put forward by US Chargé d'Affaires Ron Schlicher involved altering the wording of the resolution to avoid mentioning Israel by name as the party responsible for the Qana massacre. The American proposal suggested referring to the Qana shelling, instead, as an incident.

Despite the diplomatic crisis that erupted between Beirut and Washington, Lebanese President Elias Al-Hrawi pledged not to succumb to pressure. "We will push for the resolution despite threats," he stated. The president said that the Lebanese stand had not changed since Israel bombed the UN refugee camp in April last year. At the time, Hrawi delivered a speech to the UN, urging the world to hold Israel responsible for the massacre and to force the Israeli government to pay financial compensation to the victims.

All those killed in the massacre were seeking shelter at the UN camp during one of the strongest attacks by Israel's army against Lebanon, codenamed Grapes of Wrath. A UN inquiry at the time found that Israel's shelling of the camp in south Lebanon was "unlikely to have been the result of gross technical or procedural errors," as claimed by Israel.

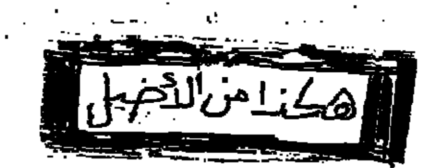
Many observers believe that the UN inquiry and its results were one of the main reasons for US President Bill Clinton to insist on the removal of former UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali from his post. The inquiry was one of Ghali's last actions before the US vetoed his candidacy for a second term as secretary-general.

Most Lebanese officials reacted angrily to the US stand on the issue. Lebanese parliament Speaker Nabih Berri said that the US attitude was nothing new. "It is similar to the US position against Ghali when he published the UN report on the Qana bombing. This resolution is a victory for the victims of Qana," Berri said.

Israel immediately denounced the General Assembly vote, describing it as "fundamentally flawed" and declared itself not morally or legally bound to pay. Israel's UN envoy, David Pelleg, reiterated the American view that singling out one country to finance a UN peacekeeping operation would undermine the future of such missions.

Lebanese observers, meanwhile, ruled out the possibility that the US would veto the renewal of the UNIFIL mandate when it comes up for a vote at the Security Council next month in light of the present deadlock in the Arab-Israeli peace process. "Washington has admitted that UNIFIL is a stabilising force in south Lebanon, and if it leaves, there might be an upsurge in fighting, paving the way for Israel to launch a new attack against Lebanon," said one analyst. UNIFIL spokesman in Lebanon Timor Goksel also discounted the possibility that the US would block the renewal of his troops' mandate.

While the Lebanese government hailed the General Assembly's resolution, many saw it as nothing more than ink on paper. Observers argue that the fate of this resolution will be the same as that of Security Council Resolution 425 which calls upon Israel to immediately withdraw its troops from its self-declared "security zone" in south Lebanon. Israel has refused to implement the resolution and said that the matter has to be settled in negotiations with the Lebanese government.



A future for D-8?

Leaders of eight Islamic countries have come together to forge the Developing-Eight grouping amid growing fears that it may face a similar fate to that of its main architect, Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports from Istanbul



photo: Reuters

The leaders of the world's eight most populous Islamic countries attending the D-8 summit in Istanbul on Sunday all had their eyes fixed on Turkey's domestic political scene in Ankara. In the halls of Ciragan Sarayi where the conference was held, foreign delegates were more likely to be heard wondering about the fate of the Erbakan-Ciller coalition than discussing D-8 economic projects. Even though the D-8 summit moved into high gear this week, many cast doubts on the future of the Islamic grouping and say that in the haste to strengthen Turkey's links with the Islamic world, Erbakan's project was ill-thought-out.

The one-day summit was attended by the presidents of Turkey, Indonesia and Iran; the prime ministers of Bangladesh, Egypt, Malaysia and Pakistan and Nigeria's industry minister. The signing of the Istanbul Declaration officially marked the establishment of the D-8 and set the stage for a grouping aimed at enhancing economic and political cooperation among its member-states.

"We, the heads of state and government of the D-8 countries decide to establish a mechanism for cooperation whose main objective is socio-economic development in accordance with the principles of peace, dialogue, cooperation, justice, equality and democracy," reads the Istanbul Declaration.

At the opening ceremony, Erbakan stated that the aim of this new group was "to gain the place we deserve in world trade and to unite to resist the tug and pull of globalisation." Erbakan added, "The D-8 will play an important role in solving the problems of humanity in our globalising world."

The summit brought a commitment on the part of the member-states to overcome trade barriers and establish joint business councils. The delegates also agreed to "the immediate implementation of the first six projects, including an international trade and marketing company, a workshop to alleviate poverty and a D-8 technological data-bank." Plans are also in the works to develop an Islamic insurance scheme and to cooperate in the domains of communication, information, energy, rural development, finance, banking and privatisation.

President Mubarak's absence featured highly in side-discussions among the delegates. It prompted Murat Sungar, the Turkish Foreign Ministry's under-secretary, to explain to reporters a day before the summit that "Mubarak did not come because he wanted to know more about the details of the project."

On the sidelines of the summit, the Turkish Prime Minister held talks with Kamal El-Ganzouri, his Egyptian counterpart, and Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. During a press briefing, Erbakan avoided answering questions on Mubarak's absence from the summit. Kamal El-Ganzouri, however, stated that President Mubarak had discussed the D-8 idea at length with Erbakan and made some comments on it.

In his summit speech, Ganzouri emphasised that, contrary to general belief, Egypt has positively responded to the Turkish initiative. Despite differences in their rate of economic growth, Ganzouri added, the D-8 countries have a common destiny, a common human heritage, historical bonds and identical problems and aspirations.

Doubts about Erbakan's hold on power overshadowed the summit. Even though Sungar admitted that a change in government may "have its impact on the fate of the D-8," he affirmed that the project was supported by all member states. "If the coalition ends, it is unknown what will happen to the D-8 projects because relations between the member countries may change due to the change in government," a diplomat attending the summit told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Despite the fact that his government has been teetering on the edge of collapse, Erbakan continued to talk enthusiastically about major D-8 projects. He went as far as describing the D-8 as a "turning point in human history."

Many officials were less than enthusiastic about Erbakan's promise to create an Islamic Common Market. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed was cautious and warned against taking things with too much haste. "At the initial stage we should not become overly ambitious. It is more prudent to be cautious and to plan our moves. Development does not just happen. It has to be made to happen," he told reporters after the meeting.

When asked how poor countries would benefit from belonging to such a gathering, one Pakistani diplomat said, "It is believed that poor countries are not good trading partners. But, what is a fact is that the rich have always traded with the poor. Obviously, they have benefited from this trade. We should be able to do the same."

The summit came under fire from Turkey's secular press, which fiercely lashed out at Erbakan's vision of Islamic cooperation. During the summit, the front pages of Turkey's main dailies were reserved for internal politics. Headlines of the *Sabah* and *Radical* newspapers dubbed the summit Disaster-8 or D-E: Dreams of Erbakan. One columnist warned that the group was an "ideological bloc which aims to politicise Islam through international organisations." A Turkish columnist commented, "Everybody knows where the D-8 came from but nobody knows where it is heading to." An article published in *Radical* said that the common features of the members of the grouping are "poverty and lack of democracy."

Even though many officials emphasised the fact that the gathering was all about economic targets, the first meeting of the D-8 member states was heavily overshadowed by politics. Even the Istanbul Declaration cited "political consultation and coordination at international forums." Many leaders seized the chance to air national complaints. For one, outgoing Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani made veiled criticisms of the economic embargo imposed on his country by referring to "the unfavourable international economic conditions which have inhibited the ability of many developing countries to service their debts."

It was agreed that the next summit would be held in Dacca, Bangladesh, at the end of 1998. While some observers believe that the future of the D-8 grouping remains unclear even among the members themselves; participants at a ministerial meeting which preceded the summit were reportedly reluctant to commit themselves to financing the group. Turkish sources who participated in the meetings told the *Weekly* that the leaders agreed that Turkey would finance D-8 activities for one year if it survives. The other seven members would start to contribute to its financing as of next year, the sources added.

"If the D-8 is going to gain credibility, results must be shown on a yearly basis," Ahmet Davutoglu, professor of international relations at Marmara University in Turkey and one of the D-8 architects, told the *Weekly*. "If we fail, then we should not make a pretence of being useful. We should fold up rather than hold meaningless meetings. That is the challenge we have to face," he explained.

... or Erbakan

Erbakan was due to resign yesterday, leaving a power vacuum. The question now is who will fill the void. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports from Ankara



Turmoil was again the name of the game this week in Turkey as Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan confirmed his intention of stepping down following months of scathing attacks against him by secularists. As *Al-Ahram Weekly* went to print, yesterday, Erbakan was due to meet later that day with President Suleyman Demirel to submit his resignation, Reuters reported. It remains to been seen whether the alliance between his Islamic Refah Party (RP) and the True Path Party (DYP) will last.

Erbakan, a key player on the Turkish political scene for three decades, came to office as head of a coalition government last June — the country's first conservative Islamic prime minister.

The one-year long political marriage between Erbakan and the DYP, which left the ardently secular politicians who have run the country for decades dazed and flustered, was plagued, however, by deep-seated rifts stemming from his Islamist policies. Further compounding matters were a number of factors, including enormous pressure exerted on him from the secular armed forces who wanted to implement a broad military-backed plan designed to crack down on Islamist radicalism. And, with a court challenge levelled against his Islamist-based Refah Party, Erbakan was left with little choice but to step down.

While the future of the coalition remains uncertain, Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller, Erbakan's coalition partner, told reporters on Monday that "as the present government will soon come to an end, a new government will replace it." Ciller's statement came in reference to the power-swap deal struck between the DYP and the RP.

Answering a question on the fate of the government following Erbakan's resignation, Ciller said that President Suleyman Demirel would give the task of forming a new government to her.

However, Turkish sources told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that it was likely that Demirel would call on Mesut Yilmaz, leader of the main opposition party, the Motherland Party (ANAP), which holds the second largest number of seats after the RP, to form a government.

An ANAP source told the *Weekly* that "it was about time that Erbakan and Ciller realise that the centre of power has shifted to those who wanted to oust Refah from power."

"The Refah-DYP coalition government is dead," said the source. "If their leaders think they still survive and run the government, they are mistaken."

Ciller also came under fire from the Turkish press. One columnist wrote, "We still observe that she hopes to become the prime minister and lead the country as the head of a DYP-Refah coalition. But Ciller has to realise that in the current power shift in Turkey, there is no room for her."

But even some critics of the coalition fear that the holding of early elections could allow the RP to once again win more than 25 per cent of the votes and emerge as the country's leading party.

"The only way left is for parliament to come up with a government that will be accepted by those who staged the ousting of Refah," Ilnur Cevik, a prominent Turkish commentator, told the *Weekly*. This government, he added, should make changes in the elections law, amend the law on political parties and open the way for new elections.

King blasts unions

Can Jordan's press and professional associations challenge an angry King Hussein bent on making them toe the line? **Lola Keilani**, in Amman, reports on the confrontation



photo: AFP

In public rallies held recently in two of Jordan's major cities, Karak and Irbid, King Hussein launched a scathing attack against professional syndicates and journalists opposing the country's peace agreement with Israel.

Questioning the loyalty of those syndicates, King Hussein stated that they were "politicised, ideologically affiliated and with allegiance to circles abroad," in what some considered a veiled reference to Syria and Iraq.

Doctors, engineers, journalists and other members of the country's professional associations listened with discomfort as the king called upon the relevant authorities to "examine the situation and reach a decision" concerning these unions.

Jordanian Interior Minister Nathir Rashid also threatened to dissolve the syndicates, claiming that Jordanian law only allows labour unions to form and operate. Rasheed said that the syndicates were "infringing on the powers of the government, and this is totally unacceptable."

The king's remarks *spotlight the high* profile Jordanian professional associations assume in the country's public life, a role that came to eclipse that of Jordan's political parties. Many of these associations oppose the country's normalisation of ties with Israel and needle the government over human rights and the freedom of expression.

The latest confrontation between the syndicates and the Jordanian government was over the recent amendments to the press and publication laws. In a press conference held last week, the heads of 12 professional associations criticised the amendments and declared them unconstitutional on the grounds that they were introduced by a royal decree and not through the parliament.

They *also* expressed solidarity with journalists by taking part in a protest near the prime minister's office.

Several protesters, including Laithe Shubilat, the well-known president of the Jordanian Engineers Association, were beaten and nine journalists, representing the foreign press, were arrested. Earlier, King Hussein had ordered the release of Shubilat from prison after he was convicted of insulting the king and the Jordanian government.

Political analysts believe that the real reason behind the king's ire is the support some syndicates and journalists gave to Jordanian soldier Ahmad Dakamseh, now standing trial for the killing in March of seven Israeli girls in Baqoura, a Jordanian border town. At the time, King Hussein cancelled a scheduled trip to the United States and headed to Israel to offer condolences. He called the act a "heinous crime," and angered Jordanian and Arab human rights activists and syndicates by saying that Dakamseh's colleagues should have shot him on the spot instead of giving him the chance to stand a trial.

The king's visit was praised by Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu and US President Bill Clinton. But Jordanian syndicates called Dakamseh a "national hero" and formed a *committee to defend him*. The "Popular Committee for the Defence of the Soldier Ahmad Dakamseh" collected $70,000 in donations to the soldier's family. The syndicates claimed that the authorities were incriminating Dakamseh ahead of trial and enlisted lawyers to defend the soldier.

The king also voiced displeasure with the syndicates' anti-normalisation attitude. He pointed out that Jordan's Agricultural Engineers Association (JAEA) was not trying to benefit from Israel's agricultural experience. "Why does a donum of land on the other side (Israel) produce 20 times more than a donum in Jordan?" he asked.

Moreover, King Hussein expressed his dismay with the press and said that certain journalists were acting against the interests of the state. The king criticised the hostile coverage he said the Jordanian press gave to leaders of friendly states. Under the new amendments of the press and publication law, such hostile reporting is punishable by up to five years in prison.

"One reads articles cursing America one day, President Clinton another, Turkey the next day, Netanyahu the third day ... in addition to cursing the state, the performance of the government ... all without objective reasoning ... in addition to articles which harm Jordan's relations with other Arab countries," the king said.

Meanwhile, Jordan's Press Association (JPA) failed twice to assemble the quorum required for the general assembly to discuss the amendments to the press and publication law. JPA Chairman Seif Sharif said that the low turnout was because some members believed that the best way to regain their rights is through quiet negotiations with the government. But a JPA council member who spoke on condition of anonymity said that the failure to reach a quorum signals the government's success in penetrating the JPA.

The JPA has presented a proposal to the government listing its reservations on some of the amended laws, and the JPA president has stated that negotiations with the government would continue.

But last week the king announced that the said amendments were introduced after a careful study and will not be rescinded.

King Hussein's next move, observers believe, could be to impose restrictions muzzling the press and limiting the power of the professional syndicates. Three years ago, the Jordanian monarch introduced a one-man-one-vote election law to secure the election of a new parliament that would support the October 1994 peace treaty with Israel. The preceding parliament, dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, was vehemently opposed to that treaty.

The latest law amendments, reinforced by the king's remarks, left the Jordanian press reeling. A satirical weekly, *Abed Rabbuh*, announced Saturday that it was suspending publication because it could not operate under the new laws.

France says no

Lionel Jospin's resounding electoral success was a clear message from French voters: no to austerity, no to economic globalisation, no to the new international order. But as the pink wave across the continent shifts to the right, asks **Eric Rouleau**, can the Left deliver on its promises?



The victory of the Left in the French elections was met with a variety of reactions: global surprise, first, then satisfaction here, anxiety there, were the main responses. Everywhere, however, the interest it aroused was equally intense. The vote not only brought about the unexpected collapse of the Right and the accession to power of the socialists in tandem with the communists and the Greens; it also opened the path to an experiment in which the stakes are very high, not only for France, but also for Europe and beyond.

The challenge that the new team must meet is, in itself, considerable: it consists of nothing less than resisting the negative impact of economic globalisation. We must not be misled with regard to the deep meaning of the French vote. *The majority of* French citizens have said no to the new international order, to which the right was exhorting them to resign themselves; they have said no to an allegedly irresistible neo-liberalism which has caused unemployment rates to sky-rocket in Europe (18 million families without income), clamped the lid on the power of purchase, and caused growing social inequalities; they have turned down the European Union, of which the main pillars are banking groups and *multinational corporations, and which was leading* them inevitably to accept austerity measures — inevitably, at least, according to the partisans of the Maastricht Treaty and a single currency. They have thus questioned even the principle of the welfare state.

The French, clearly, are hardly prepared to give up the social advantages they have enjoyed for the past 60 years (since 1936): free public education and health care, among other benefits; paid leave (five *weeks a year); unemployment benefits and pensions.* The French consider these benefits inalienable rights, and are not willing to sacrifice them at the altar of globalisation, or even that of the European Union.

The Right emphasised that these sacrifices would be temporary, lasting only until modernisation and the integration of the French economy into the European bloc gave production new impetus, created new wealth and spread prosperity throughout society. The Gaullists added that the Ecu, the single currency, would be strong enough to break the dollar's hegemony.

Public opinion, however, remained sceptical, all the more so since it had been let down by President Jacques Chirac, who in his 1995 electoral campaign had pledged to "narrow the social divide" and, furthermore, to reduce unemployment rates. Unemployment, nevertheless, has continued to rise. Official figures set the number of unemployed at over three million, but according to other estimates, this plague has *affected five million men and women,* especially young people. This amounts to 15 per cent of the active population, a rate never witnessed before in contemporary French history. Employment is so precarious that 80 per cent of employees are hired on the basis of fixed-term contracts — in other words, on a temporary basis.

The victory of the Left is also the victory of a concept: that of the primacy of the sovereign nation as against the influence of a global economic power, faceless and with no clear identity, which exists only for profit. It is an irony of history that the Left have replaced the Gaullists in the defence of the nation-state, to which General de Gaulle was so attached. He could very well have uttered the plea in favour of the state's role pronounced by Lionel Jospin at the conference of the European Community's socialist parties, *held in Malmö (Sweden) at the beginning of* June, shortly after his electoral victory. For the new prime minister, sovereignty rhymes with solidarity. He caused shock waves to ripple through a number of European governments by declaring that he would focus on growth and employment, even if that meant re-negotiating the conditions of entry to the monetary union. The union is to introduce the new currency, the Ecu, on 1 January 1999.

In parallel, Jospin outlined the aims of a new social and economic policy which gained widespread popular approval: slashing unemployment rates by establishing a 35-hour week (with no salary cuts); creating 700,000 jobs, half of which will be shouldered by the various state administrations; jump-starting production by encouraging consumption, through the re-valuation of low salaries and cuts in value-added tax on consumer goods.

The majority of the media responded to this programme with raised eyebrows and barely concealed amusement, especially in the United States, where the neo-liberal economic doctrine in force is the antonym of that advocated by the French Left.

But did the French believe the promises made by Lionel Jospin and his allies? Polls indicate that the voters were sceptical, on the whole, given the record of previous socialist governments, and especially given the scale of the challenge. But with nothing better in sight, they chose to give the left-wing coalition a chance. Will they be let down yet again?

Lionel Jospin will run up against the European obstacle sooner or later. Although the socialists and the social-democrats make up or participate in 13 of the 15 EU governments, the French prime minister was largely isolated among his peers when, in Malmo, he suggested that the struggle against unemployment take priority over the agreement on a single currency. *As* was the case with Chancellor Kohl, no one was opposed to the principle, but no one was willing to take on a financial responsibility to achieve this goal.

The evidence is blinding: the "pink wave" which, it was said, was unfolding across the old continent was only an optical illusion: a number of socialists and social democrats (like the British Labour Party under Tony Blair) have been won over by the policies of the traditional Right: according to them, the market economy, not state intervention, will solve the un*employment problem. It was clear from the start that,* whatever the compromise ultimately reached, the battle of the sovereign nation-state against globalised liberalism was far from being won.

Other obstacles, no less daunting, await the new French government, to such an extent that one already wonders how long it will be able to maintain the confidence of those who swept it to power. The contradictions between electoral pledges and reality are stark. How will the state manage to create 350,000 new jobs and institute the 35-hour week, at 39-hour rates, without deepening the budget deficit? How will it compel the private sector to generate 350,000 new jobs while economic stagnation persists? At any rate, enterprises, confronted by the laws of the global market, have largely escaped the government's hold. This was made clear recently when two multinational corporations, Electrolux and Canon, decided to lay off thousands of their workers in France, although their balance sheets are well in the black; nor will the socialist government be able to prevent Peugeot, Renault and other French industrial giants from dismissing employees.

Will the new government oppose the privatisation of large state enterprises — Air France, the SNCF, Thomson, etc. — scheduled by Juppé's government? Massive lay-offs, of course, will be avoided, but the state will thereby be deprived of the benefits of privatisation, which would have allowed the budget to be balanced before a single currency was introduced. *How can the minimum wage be increased* (at over a thousand dollars a month, it is one of the highest in Europe) without pushing small and medium businesses into bankruptcy, thereby inadvertently increasing unemployment?

Can the value-added tax on consumer goods be cut without compensating the loss incurred by an increase in various direct taxes? It is not even possible to implement the Left's traditional slogan — "Make the rich pay" — without running the risk of massive capital flight. The globalisation of the financial market dictates this inevitable result.

The socialist experiment in France is more than a challenge; it is a test for all those who wonder whether it is possible to escape the pernicious effects of globalisation, and whether the European peoples are condemned to shoulder the heavy burden of econom*ic integration, without sharing* the advantages with the banks and multinational corporations, the main beneficiaries of this economic and monetary operation.

The bets are on, as reactions on both sides of the barrier show: the Paris Stock Exchange has seen its fortunes rise since the elections, and has celebrated the victory of the Left with as much enthusiasm as that evinced by workers' syndicates. French and international business circles are so convinced that "tough economic realities" *will win the day* over the "chimeras" of a long-gone past, that they fear neither the socialist programme nor the communists' presence in government.

They may be right in the short term, but they must also realise, as the US publication *Business Week* recently noted, that "without growth, without jobs, the peoples of Europe will never accept the concept of a united Europe, and they will be right".

Translated from the French by **Pascale Ghazaleh**

Euro-socialists in Euro dilemma

EUROPEAN leaders, struggling to salvage plans for a *single currency,* opened a controversial summit in Amsterdam on Monday. The most pressing item on the agenda is to keep the new currency, the euro, on track to be launched in 1999. To achieve this goal, the summit must deal with France's new Socialist led- government, which voiced its objections over a German- inspired deal known as the "stability pact". *This agreement* imposes penalties on countries which meet the criteria for adopting the euro, then backslide though excessive public spending.

The government of French Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, believes that the austerity inherent in the "*stability pact*" must be balanced by activating growth and jobs to maintain public confidence in the broader process of European integration.

As governments slash public spending and social welfare benefits to meet the euro's stringent fiscal criteria, they face *increasing* opposition from workers who bear the brunt of the Europe's crippling 12,8 per cent unemployment.

British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, initially appeared to agree with Jospin's priorities. "Europe's leaders seem to be getting the message that job creation should be Europe's first priority," he *said.* The Prime Minister was, however, careful to balance this *statement with* new Labour's commitment to the market economy. "Labour flexibility and increased competitiveness, not huge spending programmes, are the key to getting Europe work," Blair told fellow Socialist leaders.

Labour slams globalisation

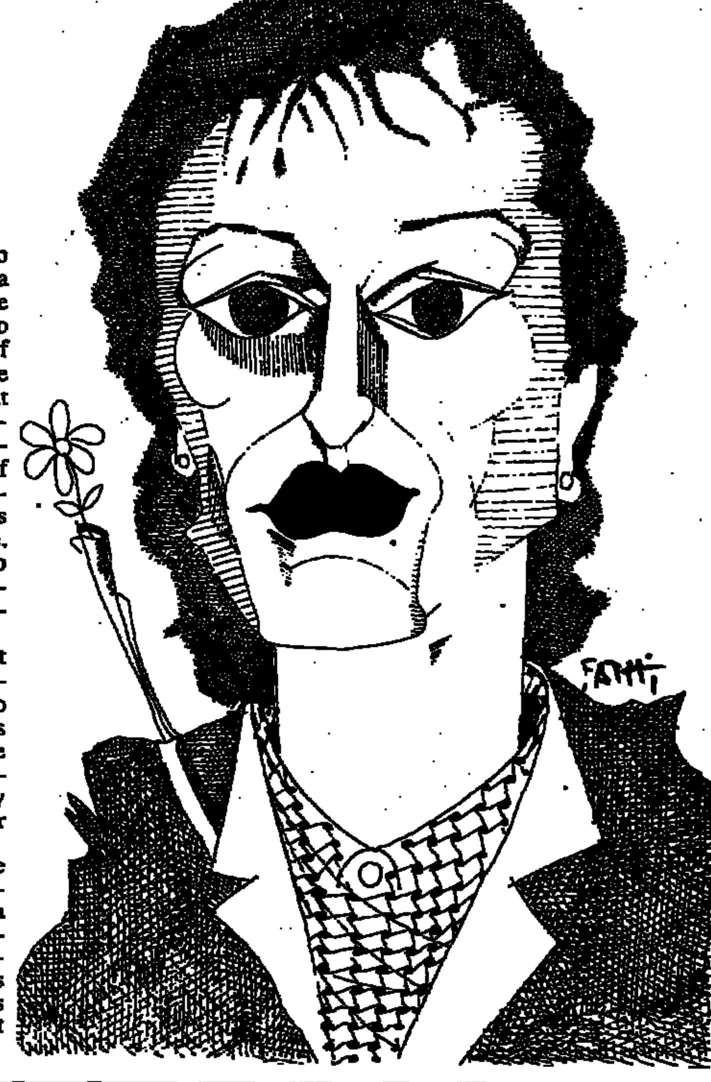
LAST week, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) — the world's biggest umbrella organisation of labour unions, representing 124 million workers in 137 countries — denounced the globalisation of economic markets, saying the trend has created staggering unemployment, decreased *salaries* and benefits and generally destabilised the unions and the work force.

Denouncing globalisation, the ICFTU's general secretary Bill Jordan said big business has claimed for the longest time that the removal of trade barriers, increased international investment and addition of 'flexibility' to labour standards would bring about economic recovery, benefiting everyone. "Instead", explained Jordan, "poverty and inequality have *increased in the developing* countries, which globalisation has drawn into a downward *spiral of ever-lower labour* standards to attract investment and meet the demands of enterprises seeking a fast profit."

Labour conditions in the North are also deteriorating fast. "The fierce competition between enterprises in the new economic jungle has split the *labour* world of the industrialised countries into two classes: those who have *lost their jobs and those who* fear losing them," reported the ICFTU. "Many of the jobs at risk are lower-paying with worse benefits than in previous years," said the Confederation.

Fighting for a lesser evil

The German authorities, following a 26-day *hunger strike and a campaign of solidarity* by human rights groups, have at last agreed to transfer former Palestinian guerrilla Sohayla Andraous from her German prison to a prison in Norway. **Dina Ezzat** reports



After a 26-day hunger strike to protest harsh conditions in a Hamburg jail, Sohayla Andraous, a former Palestinian guerrilla, pressured the German authorities to transfer her to a prison in Norway — where her family lives. The authorities also agreed to improve the terms of her imprisonment in Germany.

Last winter, a German high state security court condemned Andraous to a 12-year sentence for the killing of the pilot of a Lufthansa plane she co-hijacked in 1977 to secure the release of Palestinian political activists serving time in Israeli and European jails.

"The ruling was unfair because Sohayla was previously convicted and jailed for the same charges. But at least she will be in the same *country* with us, where we can give her moral support," said her husband, Ahmad Abu Matar who resides in Oslo with their adolescent daughter Laila.

As the plane was taking off from the Spanish island of Majorca, Sohayla and *three male hijackers* forced the pilot to take the plane to Yemen and then to the Somali capital of Mogadishu. Under pressure from the German government, the Somalis allowed a German special forces team to storm the aircraft. But according to the terms of the deal, any surviving hijacker would be subjected to Somali jurisdiction. Andraous was the sole survivor.

Although sentenced to serve a 20-year jail sentence in Somalia, the former Palestinian guerrilla was released for health reasons after 18 months . However, in October '94, Andraous was arrested in Oslo where she was living with her family and extradited to Germany — with the pretext that she had only been tried for hijacking, not for the killing of the pilot.

"Since her arrest, throughout her trial and *afterwards,* Sohayla has been very badly treated. The prison authorities were extremely hostile. They denied her the right to communicate freely with her lawyers and her family; and even when her health started to deteriorate, they still continued to treat her *in the same way,*" charged her husband, Abu Matar.

Sohayla started a hunger strike to protest this harsh treatment. "She feels that the reason she was retried and sentenced again is simply because she is Palestinian," explained her husband.

During the fourth week of her hunger strike, an intensive campaign launched by the Cairo-based Al-Nadim Centre for the Management and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and the New Woman Research Centre, in conjunction with groups in Germany and elsewhere helped to generate enough pressure on the German authorities to negotiate a deal with Andraous' lawyers. "We simply contacted every single human rights group in and out of Europe that we could think of and we asked them to voice *their views in public. We also* contacted a number of newspapers in Germany to make as much noise as possible," said Suzanne Fayad, the director of Al-Nadim.

The purpose of the campaign was to get Sohayla released, and short of that to get the German authorities to agree to her unconditional transfer to a prison in Norway, where she can serve her sentence close to her family. "As a matter of principle we are against the killing of innocent people. But we also believe that if the Israelis and Palestinians are talking about making peace, and if Yasser Arafat, for whom Sohayla was a soldier, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, then it doesn't make sense to have Sohayla retried — particularly after she quit politics," explained Fayad.

Negotiating a release was out of the question. However, Andraous' lawyers managed to pressure the German authorities to treat Sohayla better, while awaiting her transfer to a Norwegian jail at the end of July — where she will complete her sentence.

According to the terms of the agreement, the Norwegian government has no right to pardon Andraous without first referring to the German authorities. Said Abu Matar, "This means that Sohayla's chances of getting a pardon are almost nil."

A federal UK?

With more determination on the part of the new Labour government in Britain and less opposition to its policies, parliamentary devolution appears more feasible, reports **Doaa El-Bey** from London

With a date set for a referendum on the establishment of a Scottish parliament and a Welsh assembly, the United Kingdom is likely *to have both by the year 1999 or 2000.* And since the Labour Party's landslide victory, Labour has vigorously campaigned to reach these goals.

Moreover, with a parliamentary majority of 180, there is virtually nothing that can stop Labour from carrying out such a major constitutional reform, if the results of the two projected referendums show that a majority favour devolution.

Opinion polls held after the election indicate that there is overwhelming support for a Scottish parliament in Scotland, although giving tax-levying powers to this parliament is expected to receive a less enthusiastic response.

The Labour campaign in Scotland is led by the pro-devolution Scottish Secretary Donald Dewar, who has been campaigning for an independent Scottish parliament since the 1950s. He has repeatedly emphasised that devolution aims at maintaining the UK's unity. "The idea is that we strengthen the union if we show that it can adapt to the needs and accommodate the wishes of people in various parts of the Kingdom," he said during a debate in the House of Commons last month.

The Labour Party's job is more difficult in Wales where opinion polls show that less than 50 per cent of the people support a Welsh assembly. However, Welsh Secretary Ron Davies is determined to wage a *strong campaign for the assembly. In an at*tempt to maintain a united front, he asked Welsh Labour MPs to refrain from campaigning against the government's plans to establish a Welsh assembly. A handful of MPs are expected to defy Davies' warnings.

The three-week period between the referendums for a Scottish parliament and a Welsh assembly is likely to woo more supporters for the Welsh assembly, if the establishment of a Scottish parliament is widely endorsed by the Scots.

Labour set 4 September as the date for the referendum on a Scottish parliament, and 25 September for a Welsh assembly. The Scottish parliament is likely to have legislative and tax-levying powers, whereas the Welsh assembly *will not. However, if the Scottish parliament is* a success, the Welsh assembly may ask for more powers for itself.

The referendums' bill is expected to have the support of the House of Lords this month, and royal assent next month. The government will then publish "White Papers" outlining the structure, membership, electoral process and political powers granted to the Scottish parliament and the Welsh assembly. The September referendums would thus pave the way for the election of the two bodies in May 1999.

The Conservatives initially accused Labour of putting at risk one thousand years of history by promoting a constitutional upheaval, pledging before the elections to oppose devolution. However, after losing the general election, suffering from internal disarray, and seeking a new leader *and a new policy to reunite their ranks, it is un*likely that they could stop such a move. Furthermore, the Conservatives' failure to win any seats in Scotland and Wales has started a debate within the party, with senior members arguing that the party should abandon its opposition to devolution, which has proved to have strong popular support.

The Conservatives also challenged Prime Minister Tony Blair to answer the so-called West Lothian Question. This two-fold question was posed in the 1970s by Tam Dalziel, the Labour MP for the Scottish constituency of West Lothian. The question asks whether Scottish MPs would still be able to vote on English matters when English MPs no longer have a say in Scottish matters; and whether Scottish MPs would be banned from raising in the House of Commons any Scottish issues discussed by the devolved Scottish parliament.

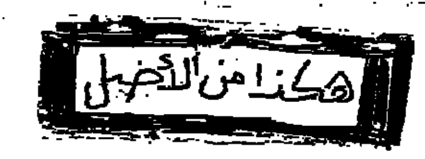
Although *Blair failed to find an answer for the* West Lothian question, he went ahead with the referendum plans insisting that devolution is one way to preserve the unity of the United Kingdom. Jamie Cann, a Labour MP, affirmed to *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the Conservatives are not justified in their fears that devolution would break up the UK. "Simply, it will not be different from Stormont, the independent parliament of Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is still represented by 18 MPs at Westminster, whose votes proved vital to the previous Tory government on may occasions," he said.

Ray Michie, a Liberal Democrat MP, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that her party is looking forward *to a gradual devolution that would lead* to a "federal UK, where Scotland in particular will look after its own affairs, raise its own revenue" and agree with the government over "what should be done by the central government and what should be done by Scotland." Michie emphasised that this could not be achieved overnight, but the Scottish parliament could be the starting point which would lead to a federal UK. "It is the way that many countries, like the US, operate," she added.

The Scottish National Party (SNP) said it would not decide which side to support in the September referendum until the government published the "White Paper" outlining its detailed proposals. SNP leader Alex Salmonds argued that the referendum should contain the option of independence and self-determination, a major demand of the Scottish people "who feel much more Scottish than English."

Salmonds told Al-Ahram Weekly that the Labour proposal, if implemented as it stands, would leave 97 per cent of political power in London and 3 per cent in *Scotland, adding* that he sees very little difference between the Tory and Labour proposals for devolution because they both exclude independence from Britain.

Yet, Salmonds strongly believes that independence is historically inevitable since "some 50 countries have gained their independence from the UK over the last decades and not one of them ever wanted to come back."



US aiding or abetting?

For two decades, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has worked hand in hand with the Egyptian government on a variety of structural adjustment and economic policy reform initiatives. But have the strings attached to the aid cost Egypt more than the $20 billion in US financial assistance were worth? Aziza Sami **talked to experts on both sides of the fence**

Aid in transition

Despite efforts on the part of the Egyptian government over the past three years to increase foreign investments, it still receives in excess of $800 million in direct United States Agency for International Development (USAID) assistance per year — second only to Israel in the amount of US aid to any single country.

Since the programme was launched over 20 years ago, and especially since the signing of the Camp David accords in 1978, Egypt has received more than $20 billion in US donor aid.

But recently, US aid, and the agency itself, have received more criticism than praise in the Egyptian press, in the People's Assembly and among the public. Many of the critics, however, have also been warning against prospects that funding levels may be reduced in the near future.

In light of these controversies, John Westley, USAID's director in Egypt, spoke to Al-Ahram Weekly *on the programme's successes and its future.*

Why, in your view, has the USAID programme come under fire in the press and the People's Assembly?

I don't think the press is fomenting anything here. But there seem to be concerns, as there always are, over US assistance to Egypt. I think there is a little bit more of that at the moment than there has been in the past. I am not sure why that is, but I am not surprised that people should have those kinds of concerns.

Is there an intention of reducing the current levels of US economic assistance to Egypt, as has been implied in recent reports ?

There has always been talk about reducing aid, because the original economic support agreement with Egypt was reached during the Camp David (peace) talks. The understanding was that we would support Egypt in a very substantial way to get through the peace process, with the implication that when the process was completed, this kind of assistance would no longer be required.

So there is always the question of when we will reach this point. There is also the additional dimension of Egypt's own economic situation, and the extent to which this kind of economic suppert is really required.

What are the prospects for the USAID programme given the liberalising of the economy, and the expected increase in private capital inflows, as opposed to economic assistance?

The government has produced a very sound stabilisation programme. Egypt is attracting a large amount of portfolio investments through the stock market, but the economy still has a long way to go before it can attain a 7-8 per cent economic growth rate.

Reaching the 5 per cent mark is already a major achievement, and we as USAID want to assure [the public] that the support we provide Egypt ever year, in the form of $815 million in economic assistance, makes the greatest possible difference to the prospects for more rapid economic growth.

However, as Egypt realises an increasingly rapid economic growth rate, the question of how much official economic support is required, as opposed to all the private economic support it is receiving, arises. People will ask how we make this transition to higher reliance on trade and investment, and less on aid.

I would think that within four or five years, the Egyptian economy will be growing rapidly so that the need for public sector economic support will be much lower.

The potential for private capital inflows is much greater than the potential for public capital flows. I think that Egypt is getting to that point — where it can now start to look to large amounts of private capital — very quickly.

When do you predict that the levels of US aid to Egypt can be substantially reduced?

It is very difficult to know when the appropriate timing for that will be. In any case, as an economist in the development profession, I would very much prefer to see us maintain a strong relationship in many of the fields in which we are working, even though the levels may decline somewhat.

In most countries USAID is working in, the level of assistance is a tiny fraction of that allocated for Egypt. So, from our point of view, we could have a very useful and constructive programme in Egypt, even at much lower levels of assistance. We could still do very useful things with the Egyptian government at those reduced levels of aid.

What economic benefits for Egypt has the USAID programme realised over the past 20 years in your view?

Slightly more than half of the AID programme has provided general support for the economy — balance of payments and budget support. The other half is project support that provides assistance in a wide range of areas.

In general USAID has worked in four fields. There is economic growth, which covers private sector development through micro-enterprise lending, agricultural development and infrastructure projects such as power and telecommunications.

Infrastructure, the largest single area we have worked in, has been important. We have supported the railroads, the telecommunications and the Suez Canal (by clearing, repairing and opening it). Before 1975 Egypt's infrastructure had not been modernised for a long time. I think we have basically done our job, and now Egypt is in a good position to keep its infrastructure in good shape.

Another of USAID's main achievements has been in expanding electric power, water and waste water [facilities], as well as telecommunications and port facilities. We have also helped in rebuilding Egypt's industrial and commercial base, through imports of commodities, equipment and intermediate goods.

USAID has also tackled the fields of democratic development support, health and population and environment through a number of projects, many of which are still ongoing.

What have been the criteria for undertaking and evaluating projects?

All we do has to be approved by the Ministry of Economy and International Cooperation. We also have to monitor and evaluate all our programmes with the organisations receiving assistance. Therefore, every time we get about half-way through a programme, we do an evaluation. The next evaluation comes at the end of the programme.

The evaluation becomes the basis for designing the new activity. The same criteria apply for NGOs, where we have to get the approval of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

USAID also has a team which monitors the different projects and reports to the US Congress.

What are the current projects in the USAID programme?

We are still working on the infrastrucutre and the environment, with the most recent initiatives aimed at combating air pollution.

In the area of agriculture, we have a very interesting project for export horticulture development. We are working with the ministry and the private sector, as well as horticulture exporters, in identifying the crops with the highest potential and the objectives they have to meet if they are going to penetrate foreign markets.

In telecommunications, we are working with the Egyptian Electricity Authority to build a 1,200 megawatt power plant in Kureimat, opposite Beni Suef which, I believe, is Egypt's largest thermal power plant. The largest single power plant is the High Dam which is 2,000 megawatts. We are also continuing our work with ARENTO (telecommunications), putting up the switching systems needed to add more telephone lines.

Another current project, which began in 1989, is in the area of micro-enterprise lending. This project has provided more than 200,000 loans to over 60,000 borrowers, and probably created employment for more than another 60.000 borrowers.

How has privatisation affected the aid programme?

The most important programme supporting private sector development is the Commodity Import Programme (CIP), which started in 1986. Of the total $815 million Egypt receives in aid each year, the US Congress has earmarked $200 million for this programme.

The CIP originally began in 1975, providing support for the public sector. It has been instrumental in helping reduce the balance of payments [deficit] and improving the country's negative foreign exchange [reserves] position.

Today, the CIP works solely on supporting the private sector. The programme operates, through 23 banks, from which clients borrow funds to bring in US goods. They are granted a grace period, the length of which depends on the type of transaction. The goods imported can either be raw materials or capital goods.

Supporting NGOs is an important part of the programme, but some have declined to work through USAID because of its strict funding guidelines. How does USAID work with NGOs?

We are entering a new phase of support for NGOs which will begin next year. But at this point, the approach is to support an American NGO called the National Council of Negro Women, and they in turn work with Egyptian NGOs in supporting their programmes.

The reason for this is that our accountability requirements are very difficult for Egyptian NGOs to meet directly. By channelling the funds to American NGOs, they have to meet our requirements and then they, in turn, work with their Egyptian counterparts, which meet the requirements indirectly.

Supermarket strings

Charges leveled against the US financial assistance programme range from the misuse of grant funds by local institutions, to aid having created a 'comprador class' catering to US interests, without benefiting the economy. Its critics refute the contention that USAID has promoted either GDP growth or exports.

Perhaps the most searing criticism has been directed by Galal Amin, a professor of economics at the American University in Cairo who, challenging the philosophy behind aid, argues that its potential costs far outweigh its benefits.

How do you assess the USAID programme?

On the whole, I believe that the impact of aid has been negative. Over the past 20 years, we have received tremendous amounts of aid with very poor results.

There is one important principle underlying all of this. Getting used to aid is very much like getting addicted to drugs — you get temporary relief, though you could have done much better without it. When you depend on aid, it is very clear what happens to your foreign policy, and what the donor can do is too obvious to mention.

The whole objective of the USAID programme has been to push the peace process through.

In terms of economic policy as well, the donor can dictate the general policy you have to follow. Structural adjustment and stabilisation policies, etc. are all very nice names for some awful things. What they amount to is a liberal economy before you are ready to have one.

It was only under the pressure of foreign aid, coupled with debt relief, that Egypt went along with the IMF and World Bank's prescriptions [for reform].

But hasn't USAID, based on its own objectives, helped in attaining what it had set out to do — namely to help effect the transition to a liberal economy?

They say that Egypt is just starting to reap the results of reform. With a programme that is one of the highest per capita in the world, isn't it strange that after 20 years aid did not produce better and more expedient results.

Isn't it also strange that we are still asked to wait?

What, in your view, would have been an alternative course for development?

There was an alternative: much greater attention to investment in agriculture — rationalising agricultural policy in order to produce enough food. There was the reform of public finances, greater mobilisation of national savings and the reduction of unnecessary expenditure, all of which would allow you to increase investment rates without relying on aid.

All of this is not as difficult as advocates of aid claim. They allege that these are harsh measures which only a totalitarian regime can undertake. But the reason why these policies are often harsh is that the government which tries to implement them is pressured to move in the opposite direction by aid donors.

Things do not need to be so harsh. A course of development not dependent on aid would have had economic, social and political repercussions of benefit to the whole population.

Very few have benefited from aid. A certain segment of the population, such as middlemen between donors, on the one hand, and between exporters and foreign investors, on the other — who take commissions on all types of transactions — have benefited. These individuals could be government officials, businessmen, politicians and even intellectuals.

How do you assess infrastructural and telecommunications projects, both of which are among USAID's largest undertakings in Egypt?

USAID has funded many projects which no one can object to, such as the revamping of the sewage system in Cairo and Alexandria, and the work in infrastructure and telecommunications.

But I see all of these as a commodity in a supermarket, where you get something for free on condition that you buy a lot of things you do not need, but are being charged for anyway.

How do you assess USAID policies in the agricultural sector?

In the mid-70s Dr Mustafa El-Gabali [a prominent agronomist] presented a complete and detailed plan for Egypt to produce its own food. The plan, however, which included all kinds of cultivation from clover to raising poultry and fish, was rejected in favour of foreign donor assistance.

Aid in the agricultural sector drives farmers into a particular crop pattern — one usually geared for exports in order to increase foreign currency. This is part of the general philosophy behind foreign aid.

This obsession with exports is based on the assumption that anything resulting in an increase of trade is good. The experience of other countries has shown that a big increase in export revenue can come at a very high cost — negatively affecting the standard of living of the poor.

The question then becomes: What do you do with the export proceeds realised when the peasant is encouraged to grow an export crop that could improve the balance of payments, albeit at the expense of the farmer's actual needs? It is the importer with access to foreign markets who decides how the proceeds from exports will be used — whether, for example, he will buy cars with these funds.

But many of the charges concerning the inefficiency or misuse of grant funds have been directed to local institutions — the recipients of the aid, rather than the donors.

I really cannot believe that the donors of aid could not have the same leverage in economic matters, as in political ones. There are many ways by which the aid donors could have ensured that it reaches the right people — for example, through the so-called Social Fund for Development (SFD). It could get more money, and the donor could make sure it was distributed correctly, without infringing on the sovereignty of the Egyptian government.

But the idea is to have political leverage over the government. Once the money reaches the government, the donor is happy and does not care what happens.

In an institution like the SFD, apart from choosing the right management, they have to monitor how the money is used. I don't think that monitoring is done in good faith.

CIP for VIPs?

Critics charge that USAID has been monopolised by a privileged few, with new businessmen's monopolies created by the $200 million per year Commodity Import Programme

A key portion of the USAID programme aimed at providing financing for Egyptian importers has, according to critics, become a tool pandering to the needs of a selective group of businessmen.

The Commodity Import Programme (CIP), for which $200 million of the more than $800 million in USAID funds to Egypt are earmarked, has come under fire recently for setting certain requirements unattainable by all but a few privileged businessmen.

The programme, which began in 1975 to fund public sector imports from the US required — until 1995 — that a businessman undertake at least $100,000 in transactions in the US per year to be eligible for financing. Moreover, critics allege that the programme has not been widely publicised, further creating a cartel-of-sorts among businessmen.

If these charges hold water, then it means that the CIP has missed its mark. "We are interested in reaching as many firms as possible," explained Arthur Laemmerzahl, USAID's director of Commodity Management and Trade.

With the $100,000 minimum too rich for most peoples' blood, USAID reduced the figure to $10,000. "Previously, we had required that importers put together transactions of no more than $15 million and no less than $100,000 before importing from the US. But this proved to be counterproductive because we were not reaching the smallest firms," he explained. "Therefore, in 1995, we dropped the requirement to $10,000 in order for smaller firms, with smaller import requirements, to have access to the programme."

Under the programme, Egyptian importers are able to secure loans from any one of 23 Egyptian commercial banks. The loans are offered with a variety of grace periods, depending on the transactions, and payments go back to the Central Bank of Egypt. Among the goods that may be imported from the US are production equipment and machinery, intermediate goods and raw materials.

Despite these changes, critics argue that the lack of publicity for the programme, coupled with preferential treatment afforded by some banks to certain clients, means that many who could benefit from the CIP are left out.

"Certain clients might be monopolising the programme through their access to banks," admits Salah Mahmoud, chairman of the Egyptian Gulf Bank and the MM Group. "But this is the responsibility of the banks, not USAID."

But according to Cairo Barclays Bank Director of Credit Samia Ayyad, accusations that the banks are partial to some clients are unfounded. "Each bank, depending on its credit policies, decides whether a client is eligible for the programme," she stated.

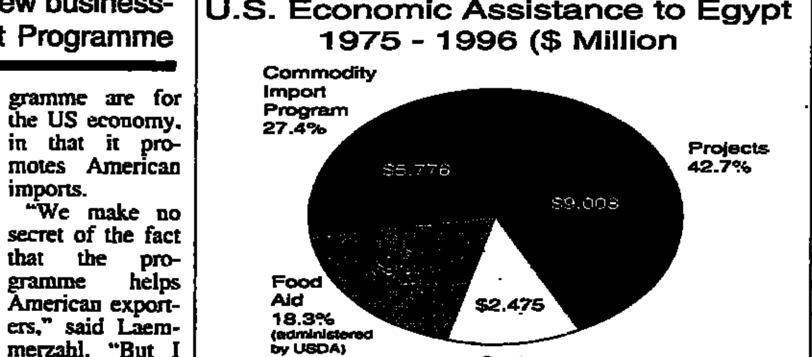
Problems with the programme aside, the CIP, says Mahmoud, is actually invaluable in that it provides exporters like him with the funding and technology to upgrade their production lines and export capacity.

"This kind of assistance is invaluable in preparing exporters for the increased competition that will come about with the implementation of GATT," he said.

Critics stress, however, that the only real benefits realised through the programme are for the US economy, in that it promotes American imports.

"We make no secret of the fact that the programme helps American exporters," said Laemmerzahl. "But I also think that we have helped introduce Egypt to the world market."

"There are a number of companies whom we have helped with exports, such as the Oriental Weavers, who now have a permanent exhibit in Moscow," he continued. "I hope that this programme creates new jobs. This is more important, but whether or not we create billionaires is not really the issue."



Edited by **Ghada Ragab**



Counting chickens, eating crow

In a classic case of counting chickens before they have hatched, pundits lauded what appeared to be a breakthrough in the long-stalled negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The rationale behind this line of thought was to get the two parties together and something tangible should emerge. Unfortunately, nothing tangible, save for Israel's continued intransigence, has emerged from the recent talks.

Netanyahu still stands firm on the misguided premise that the only an Israeli formula will lead to a just and comprehensive peace. Allon-Plus is but one recent example of this line of reasoning. Similarly, repeated efforts to underscore the need to halt, or at least delay, settlement construction have fallen on deaf ears. In short, nothing has changed.

Egyptian efforts at mediating between the two parties, best exemplified by the shuttle diplomacy on the part of presidential advisor Ossama El-Baz are, in the words of the Palestinians, unlikely to bear fruit at this time. A skillful diplomat, El-Baz is no miracle worker. So long as Netanyahu refuses to understand that the word "just" in just peace refers to equality rather than Israel only, any initiatives seem destined to meet with a similar fate.

This is especially true in light of actions taken by the Congress of the self-dubbed honest broker of peace, the US. While the main point of contention has been that the status of Jerusalem is to be decided during the final status negotiations, the US House of Representatives sees it fit to imply, through the passage of a recent resolution, that this holy city will be Israel's united capital. The honest broker does not seem so honest after all.

That having been said, then where does the solution to this crisis lie. Realistically, the solution is in making concessions. And if Israel has its way, the only concessions that will be proffered will be on the part of the Palestinians, who may end up signing this agreement in blood — both their own and that of Israelis.

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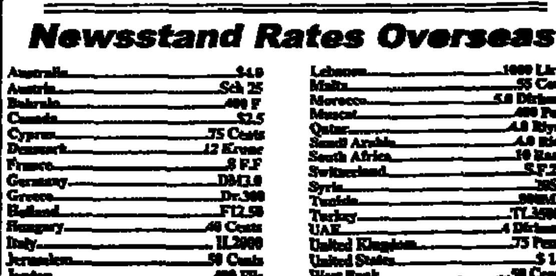
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Helms-Burton for Palestine?

If the US can do it, why can't the Arabs. Palestinian rights are no less worthy than those of Cuban émigrés. James Zogby calls for the reinstatement of the Arab boycott of Israel

In the very early stages of the Madrid process, five Arab states offered an important confidence building gesture to the Israeli government. Their offer: if Israel would agree to stop settlement construction, they would agree to suspend the secondary boycott against countries and companies doing business with Israel.

Then Secretary of State James Baker heralded the gesture and the peace effort took a giant step forward.

Looking at the record establishes that Israel has not lived up to its end of this bargain. In the five years since the Arabs made this confidence-building move, Israel has confiscated more Palestinian land and built more Jewish-only housing units than in any other previous five years period of the occupation.

Meanwhile, several Arab states even made gestures to end the primary boycott by opening Israeli trade offices and by inviting Israeli trade delegations to both multilateral and bilateral trade meetings.

I believe that it's time to re-evaluate the Arab move.

While the US continues to oppose any remnants of the Arab boycott — using excessive language, calling it "repugnant" or "vile", to establish its case, clearly the Arabs have a right to demand an accounting from Israel and the US.

And since Israeli settlement construction and new land confiscations continue, it might even be time for the Arab League to reinvigorate the entire effort.

I was brought up to believe that the boycott was an Arab response to the massive injustices done to the Palestinians during the creation of the state of Israel. Let us recount what Israel did right after 1948:

- 6,500,000 dunums of Arab land were confiscated;
- at least 385 Palestinian villages were completely destroyed;
- tens of thousands of homes, stores, orchards, and farmlands were simply taken over;
- over 875,000 Arabs were made refugees and denied their rights.

The sad truth is that despite a good faith effort to resolve some of these injustices through a staged peace process, the major tragedies that have befallen the Palestinian people have not only not been addressed but are now growing — with new tragedies and injustices added each day.

I do not favour the method of embargo. An honest and balanced peace process is to be preferred. But if the Arab world does not strengthen its position in this process and place its just and historic grievances on the negotiating table, I fear that the inequity in the current peace process will not be remedied and Palestinian grievances will not be resolved.

I propose taking a lesson from the US Congress. In an effort to strengthen the US case against Cuba and to enlist international support for its embargo, the Congress passed a controversial amendment last year entitled the "Cuba Liberty and Democratisation Solidarity Act". (The act is better known as the 'Helms-Burton Act' after its two sponsors, Senator Jesse Helms and Dan Burton. Although reviled by supporters of free trade and contested by our allies in the Americas and Europe, the act deserves to be examined for its practical applications.

Under the heading, "Protection of Property Rights of United States Nationals" the act establishes that:

"The Congress makes the following findings:

(1) Individuals enjoy a fundamental right to own and enjoy property.

"(2) The wrongful confiscation or taking of property...by the Cuban Government, and the subsequent exploitation of this property...undermines the comity of nations, the free flow of commerce, and economic development...

"(5) The Cuban Government is offering foreign investors [opportunities]...using property and assets, some of which were confiscated ...

"(6) This "trafficking" in confiscated property provides badly needed financial benefit...to the current Cuban Government and thus undermines the foreign policy of the United States ...

"(8) The international judicial system...lacks fully effective remedies for the wrongful confiscation of property...

"(10) The United States Government has an obligation to its citizens to provide protection against wrongful confiscation by foreign nations and their citizens, including the provision of private remedies..."

And based on these findings the act establishes provisions designed to force foreign companies into observing the US embargo by threatening them with lawsuits and other penalties.

I hasten to add that while I have disagreed with the act, I do understand the frustration of some Cuban Americans seeking to restore their rights and freedoms in Cuba by means of a remedy as dramatic as this act. And I believe that the even more disturbing injustices experienced by the Palestinians and their frustrations require at least as dramatic a response.

What is important about framing an action in this way is that it focuses attention on the principles of justice and rights and on the people who are victimised by the abuse of these principles. And this is what I believe the Arab League must do.

It is important in this period to educate the West about the history of injustice that has been the fate of the Palestinian people. If necessary, action must be taken to demand restoration of their just rights. To establish the justification for taking these actions, the world must be reminded of the millions of lives that are at stake in this context.

It is imperative that there be a public accounting of the losses incurred by the Palestinians, and countries and businesses must be informed that they can no longer benefit at the expense of Palestinian losses. There are recent examples of Jews, Bosnians, South Africans, Poles, and Cubans doing the same. Palestinian rights are no less worthy.

I'm sure that some in the US Congress will protest such an Arab action and use their special vocabulary reserved for any actions taken by Arabs — but when the humanity of the Palestinians is established and the reality of their losses and suffering is understood, more will be done and balance might be restored.

The writer is president of the Washington-based Arab American Institute.

Europe's responsibility

On the occasion of President Mubarak's visit to Paris today for consultations with French President Jacques Chirac on Europe's role in the Middle East peace process, Mohamed Sid-Ahmed urges Europe to adopt a more hands-on approach to the faltering peace talks

As the peace process lurches from one crisis to the next, it seems that only a radical reassessment of the conflict-resolution mechanisms employed to date can break the vicious circle. In the recent period, I have advanced a number of ideas in this column aimed at exploring new avenues in that direction.

One avenue was to try and shift the focus of the conflict into Israel itself and, in collaboration with Israeli peace forces, implement a strategy aimed at isolating the extremists headed by Netanyahu. But Netanyahu effectively closed off that avenue by successfully neutralising his opponents. The choice of Ehud Barak, a Labour variant of the Likud prime minister, to succeed Peres as leader of the opposition Labour Party testifies to Netanyahu's success — and to the failure of Israel's peace forces to come forward with a viable alternative to his policies.

I then tried to probe the ambiguities and inconsistencies in the land-for-peace formula, which is generally recognised as the cornerstone on which the entire peace process rests. My purpose in highlighting the shortcomings of the formula was not to call for its abandonment; it is, after all, the only available frame of reference for the peace process. Also, the fact that Netanyahu opposes the principle of a land-for-peace tradeoff is an additional reason to uphold it.

On the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the six-day war, I wrote that a logical flaw inherent in the land-for-peace formula is that it is regarded as the only basis for a solution of the conflict, while it is by no means the only possible approach to the problem. For it was not a foregone conclusion that Israel would score a devastating victory in 1967 and occupy wide areas of Arab territory which it would later use as a bargaining chip in its bid for recognition by and peace with the Arabs.

In other words, if the 1967 episode of the conflict could have been avoided, then the basis for a solution of the conflict cannot be made conditional on that episode and a solution must be sought elsewhere.

This presupposes that the conflict does not fit into an established pattern, thus endowing it with a specificity of its own. How true is this statement? And should it be considered true in all conditions? The statement is certainly true if the conflict is seen through a narow regional prism as being confined to the Middle East, as involving only Arabs and Israelis. For the Arabs, the creation of the state of Israel in their midst at the expense of Arab Palestine has no legitimacy whatsoever: they contest Israel's very right to exist, not what borders it should have. For the Israelis, Israel's right to exist supersedes every other consideration. Zionists base this claim on the right of Jews to a haven in the land of their ancestors after suffering persecution in Europe for centuries, culminating in Hitler's Final Solution. If placed in a purely Middle Eastern context, the conflict is between two parties whose claims are absolutely antipodal.

However, the rules of the game change if the conflict is visualised in a wider context, as also involving a third party, Europe, which was originally responsible for the persecution of Jews. True, the Zionist call for a Jewish state in Palestine predated the Holocaust, but without the Holocaust and, more generally, without widespread anti-Semitism in Europe, the call may never have been translated into reality.

If it is true that the seeds of the Arab-Israeli conflict were sown in Europe, then it follows that a solution of the conflict must somehow involve Europe. Some could argue that Europe's historical responsibility in triggering the conflict initially is a thing of the past and that no leverage is available to compel Europe to shoulder its responsibilities in the present. But to dismiss the scourge of racism as a thing of the past is deceptive. For racism is on the rise in Europe today, confirming my previously expounded theory that it is an inevitable outgrowth of a world system based simultaneously on globalism and a North-South dichotomy. Because of the gap between the rich North and the poor South, gravitation towards the North is irresistible, especially as the growing trend towards globalism slackens physical barriers. But as these fall, they are replaced by 'spiritual', i.e., racist, barriers. The phenomenon is global. US President Clinton warned this week against the revival of segregation in America.

A possible reason for the revival of anti-Semitism in Europe is that the Jews who were so brutally persecuted in the first half of the twentieth century have been, in the eyes of many, over-compensated in the second half of the century. Discrimination to their advantage, like discrimination against them, is unhealthy: both breed anti-Semitism. On the other hand, Islam is perceived in the North as the main ideological mobiliser of the destitute and frustrated masses against the privileged North. Failure to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict can only exacerbate all these contradictions.

The European Union already has an emissary to the Middle East. However, his role cannot be limited to complementing Washington's sponsorship of the peace process, even if it should introduce such new dimensions as ensuring a greater role for civil society in the process itself. Europe's contribution to the peace process in the Middle East should be perceived as part and parcel of a new global strategy designed to counter the revival of racial discrimination in the world at large and in Europe in particular.

My own tradition

By Naguib Mahfouz

The traditional novel consists of a story in prose fleshed out by characters playing out a scenario chosen by the author. In the past, the greater the number of events described in the novel, the more exciting it became. Novels were often so voluminous that they were published in several volumes, as was the case with Tolstoy, Dostoievsky, Thomas Mann and Galsworthy.

The rebellion against the structure of the classical novel and the episodic novel that unfolded in the middle of the 20th century had really begun at the turn of the century. One of its pioneers was the great British author, Aldous Huxley, whose works are described as novels without stories — situations explored by the author. Huxley's innovations were followed by the stream-of-consciousness trend that confirmed his first pioneering steps, as represented by James Joyce. This trend attained its apogee in the modern novel or anti-novel which in my opinion put an end not only to the concept of "episode" but to the meaning of the novel itself, so that novels have become impenetrable to the average reader brought up on traditional fare.

I have used all these different styles in my novels, but without submerging myself completely in any one form or subscribing to a specific school. I cannot write a novel entirely in stream-of-consciousness style, although I have used this technique in several of my novels when I considered it appropriate, just as I have written stories and novels without episodes. The common factor in all my work has been tradition.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week — 'More Zionist than Herzl'

Al-Wafd: "Congress' decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel comes as a new affirmation of the influence of the Jewish lobby over Congress and as a heavy blow to the peace process, which is on its last legs. This move is a winning card in the hand of those who oppose peace, and it may serve as a pretext to spark off a new wave of violence that could lead the region to a true catastrophe. The Arabs must move forcefully to counter the effects of this dangerous decision. An Arab summit meeting should be held to adopt a clear position toward any nation that takes a similar decision."
(Editorial, 13 June)

Al-Gomhuria: "There is nothing strange about Congress' decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital. What is strange is that it should have been taken with a majority of 406 votes for and only 17 against, which means that the hardliner Netanyahu has a larger majority in Congress than in the Knesset... This decision means that in the US there are those who are more royalist than the king and keener Zionists than Herzl!"
(Kamel Zoheiri, 14 June)

Akhbar El-Yom: "The latest blow the US patron of the peace process has directed at the Palestinians is the Congressional decision to move the US Embassy to occupied Jerusalem. This is a dangerous decision that can destroy the peace process once and for all and usher in a new era of violence, strife and wars. This is not lost on anyone and hence the State Department's haste in issuing a statement saying that the US position on Jerusalem has not changed. Yet all this does not change the face of the 'sole patron' of the peace process, which is biased towards one side and against the other. This decision also shows the US as being manipulated by the Zionist lobby."
(Ibrahim Saeda, 14 June)

Al-Ahram: "Despite the fact that the US administration voiced its opposition to the Congressional decision to recognise unified Jerusalem as the eternal capital of Israel, its subsequent actions show it to be hostile to Arab rights, whether in East Jerusalem or elsewhere. It is noticeable that the State Department is pushing hard to move the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Furthermore, the US administration does not approve of Egyptian efforts to push the peace process forward in order to prevent the situation in the Middle East from reaching the point of explosion. It considers Egypt's stance to be too pro-Arab and wants it to adopt a neutral, and hence non-Arab, or even a pro-Israeli stance. All this cannot serve the peace process or the achievement of stability in the region. Indeed, this sort of thinking can achieve nothing whatsoever."
(Editorial, 15 June)

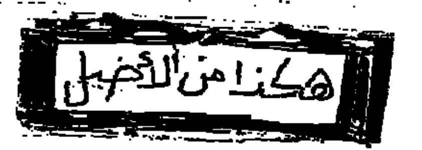
Al-Ahram Al-Messa'i: "We do not wish to say that the US has reached the point of instigating Israel to adopt stubborn hard-line positions towards the just demands of the Palestinians, but there is no other way of explaining recent US policies — beginning with the use of the veto against every international resolution condemning Israeli violations and ending with Congress' decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital. US policies have given Israel the green light to do as it pleases against peace in the knowledge that it will find the necessary support."
(Editorial, 15 June)

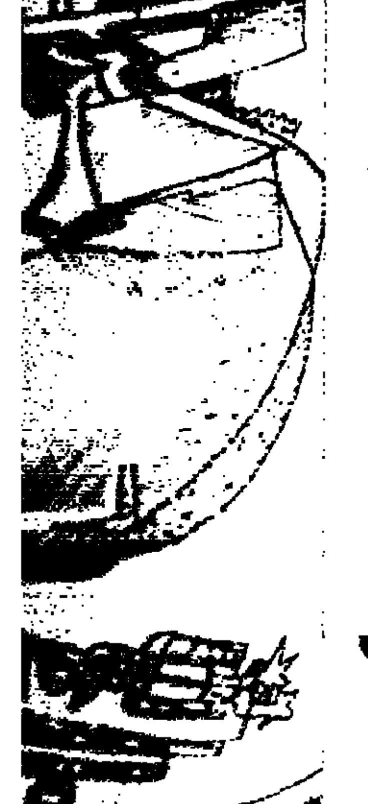
Al-Arabi: "The pro-Israeli media in the West has moved to condemn the assassination of those the Palestinians have dubbed "land traitors" — estate agents who facilitated the sale of Palestinian lands to Jews to make new settlements of them! For the first time in the history of any conflict a handful of traitors have become a major issue. Speaker of the US House of Representatives Newt Gingrich described the assassinations as "neo-Nazism" and threatened to cut off financial aid to the PNA if it does not take appropriate measures. With the Israeli whip in one hand and US dollars in the other, the congressman has every right to talk with such arrogance. He must have read the reports of corruption in the PNA which prompted — or forced — the Palestinian public prosecutor to resign."
(Abdallah El-Sinawy, 16 June)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



The contrasting lines of desert and rugged mountains provide the main outlines of this portrait — dry, stubborn, confident... and proud. Aridity, but also time, have left their marks. Deep lines have been engraved by the current conflicts which Muammar Qaddafi must withstand. Even the burning winds of the sandstorm have left lines on this well-worn face.





own tradition

By Naguib Mahfouz

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Empty promises

Egypt cannot accept the extravagant praise and empty words uttered by the spokesman of the US State Department in Washington from time to time, while ignoring the fact that Egypt's efforts to revive the peace negotiations are going nowhere. No political backing is forthcoming from the American sponsor and nothing but a steel wall of refusal comes from Israel.

Since President Mubarak's last meeting with Netanyahu in Sharm El-Sheikh three weeks ago, it is clear from the Israeli prime minister's remarks and reactions that he neither expects nor wishes for a solution to the problem that led to the rupture in Palestinian-Israeli negotiations three months ago. Then again, perhaps he is simply unable to come up with a solution to this problem, that of the Israeli settlements. Israel's consistent violations of the spirit and text of its agreements with the Palestinians reached a peak when construction began on the settlement of Jebel Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem.

There never was any real justification for Egyptian envoy Osama El-Baz's shuttling back and forth between Tel Aviv and Gaza, since the Israeli side had refused any compromise from the very beginning, including the Egyptian suggestion of freezing construction work at Jebel Abu Ghneim for a given period to allow for the resumption of negotiations.

It seems, however, that in spite of all the discouraging signs, the Egyptian efforts have revealed two facts: first, the standstill in the negotiations is entirely the responsibility of Israel; second, there is no truth in the declarations of the US media that Egypt is responsible for holding up or blocking the negotiations.

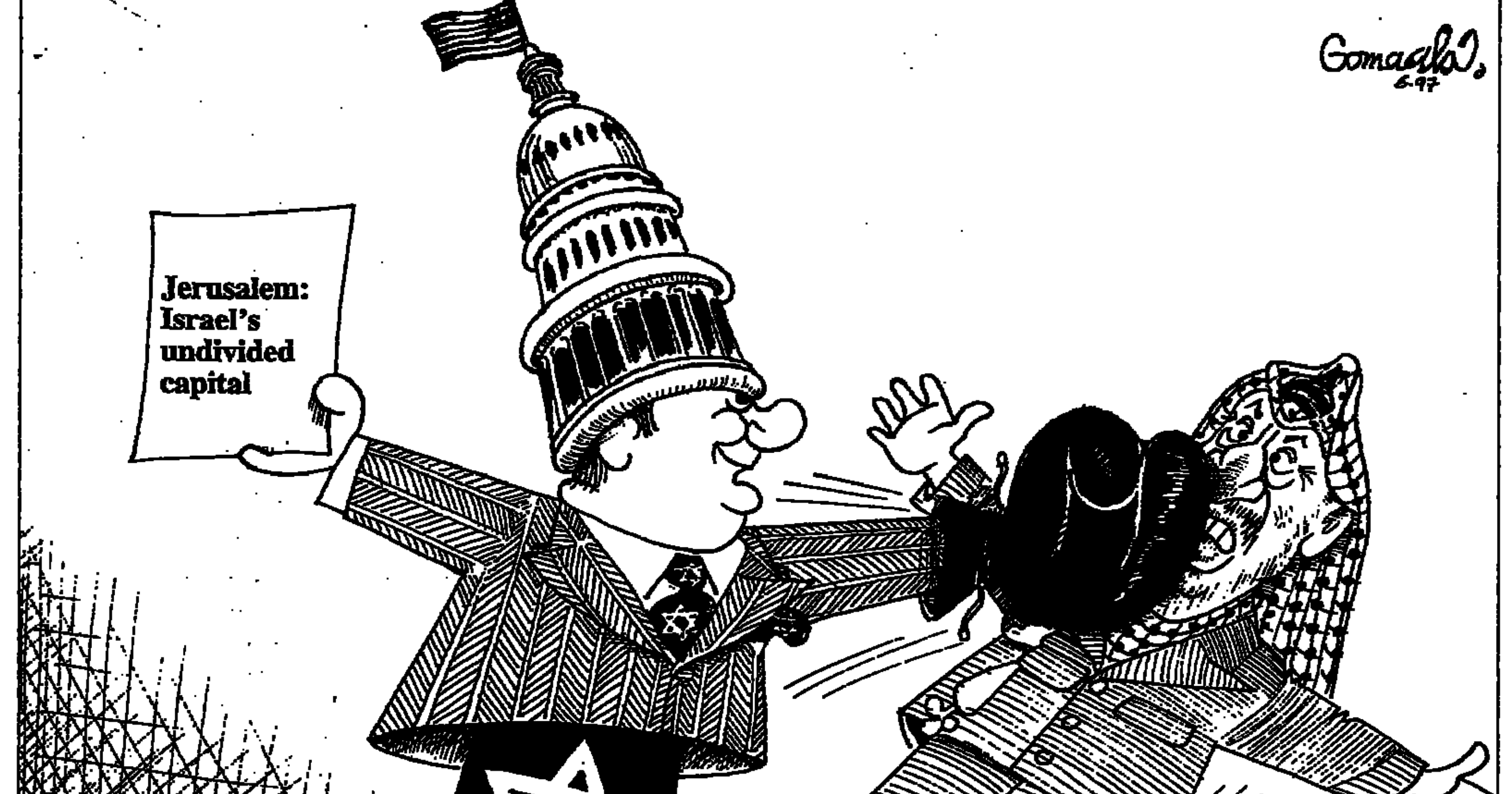
Egypt has shown its willingness to divert its role — which it should not have done — and adopt that of the Americans as an honest broker, now that US politicians have washed their hands of the issue after the harsh criticism levelled at US envoy Dennis Ross by the Palestinians.

As a result, Egypt has received much undeserved criticism. Its initiative was met with accusations that it helped break the chain isolating Netanyahu and revived false hopes of coming to an understanding with him, that it gave Israel an opportunity to carry on construction of its settlements and encouraged Israel's backers in Congress to tear up what remained of the peace agreements. It was also said that it weakened the Palestinians' position and probably pushed them into dropping their demand that work on the construction of settlements in Jerusalem and other parts of the West Bank cease immediately.

These efforts only succeeded in allowing Netanyahu to clarify his plan to occupy 60 per cent of the area of the West Bank, leaving the Palestinians only 40 per cent. The Palestinians now have no other choice but to accept self-rule in a number of cantons controlled by Israeli security. This situation has added to Palestinian frustration and exasperation, not only with regard to Israel but also with their own leaders in the Palestinian Authority who accepted Oslo and its consequences, thus stifling the spirit of Intifada, and leaving them locked up in Gaza and the West Bank.

The failure of Egyptian efforts does not mean that Egypt should bear responsibility for the horrific results of the situation exploding in Gaza and the West Bank.

Egypt must demand that Arab and international public opinion be informed of the results of these efforts and disclaim any responsibility for their failure. Egypt must also clarify the position of the Israeli government and the US administration, which had committed itself to guaranteeing the implementation of the Oslo agreement. Egypt should not be expected to continue to pursue futile discussions and contacts which could only benefit Netanyahu and Israel, nor must it please Washington, which has abandoned its role. Egypt owes it to its people and the Arab nation not to cover up this latest product of US-Israeli cooperation.



Soapbox

Building from bilateralism

The risk of Israeli dominance of Middle East Free Trade Area (FTA) arrangements makes economic cooperation among Arab subgroups necessary prior to any wider regional arrangements.

This approach has a concrete parallel in the case of Latin America. In view of the possibility of US dominance of FTA, a Southern Cone Common Market was created in March 1991.

In the Arab context, Arab cooperation could be based on bilateral deals without forming an explicit regional organisation or governance structure. This would deepen economic relations and align the macro-economic policies of various Arab countries.

Whatever form inter-Arab cooperation might take, it could provide a counterweight to economic pressure from Israel. There is no reason to think that past failures in Arab economic cooperation and integration dictate the failure of future attempts in this respect.

The European model of regional integration cannot be easily transposed to the Middle East for a host of political and cultural reasons. A long period of confidence-building is required to counteract decades of intense conflict. Moreover, partners in any regional scheme must cross a certain threshold of similarity in their objectives before any partial surrender of national autonomy.

This process must occur in a voluntary fashion, avoiding the subordination of any country to the strategic preferences of another regional power. "Forced" regional projects will be politically unacceptable and unsustainable.

This week's Soapbox speaker is professor of economics at Cairo University. **Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil**



Reading it the wrong way

Unless concrete steps are taken to reconcile the maximum the Arabs expect with the minimum the US is willing to offer, writes **Nassif Hitti**, misunderstanding and conflict will prevail

Because the US is the most influential and largest foreign power on the Middle Eastern political scene, whether it exercises its authority directly or indirectly, Arab attempts to interpret and anticipate US policies abound. One reading may be dubbed the "second term" reading. This attempt to determine the impact of US policy on the Arabs, places its hope in a US president reelected to a second term, as in the case of President Clinton.

The "second term" reading is a wishful-thinking approach. It stems from the hope that, once reelected, the US president will have extricated himself from the Zionist lobby. Relieved of the pressure exerted by the Jewish lobby during the elections, the president, according to this version of events, will act freely according to his high principles and will pressure Israel into accepting terms it has been rejecting. Soon, however, the hopes of the second *term dreamers are dashed, and the president* fails to take the action necessary to bring about the changes they had awaited.

The Arabs commonly use wishful thinking in their reading of US policy at various points in time. It is, however, an oversimplification of matters and, in its extreme forms, becomes a conspiracy theory reading. The conspiracy reading reached its quintessential manifestation in the theory which claimed that Kissinger had planned and set off the war in Lebanon. While conspiracy is one of the methods used in the management of political relations, interpreting every event as the result of a conspiracy may be a deliberate attempt to conceal other important facts which contribute to shaping and consequently influencing the outcome of any given scenario.

The pro-Israel lobby, which comprises strong Zionist elements, remains the most active and powerful factor in American foreign policy decisions towards the Middle East. Its intrinsic power emanates from the commitment, organisation and ability to present issues which concern the lobby as national or political issues which concern the party the support of which it seeks. The strength and influence of the pro-Israel lobby is increased if only through the opponents' inability to present itself as an attractive alternative offering equal political gains to the US decision-maker.

Two more elements should be taken into consideration. First, American citizens feel a cultural and psychological affinity to all that has to do with Israel, even though there are clear indications that such acceptance is diminishing to some extent. Issues related to Israel are viewed as part of US domestic policy, and Israel remains part of the political psyche of the US administration. The second, and most important, element is the absence of sufficient incentive or deterring force, such as a crisis, to guide decision-making. Alternately, a strong Arab stance could actively and effectively urge the US into conflict, either directly with Israeli policies, or indirectly, through the Israeli lobby. Thus the US administration will be forced to take the risk and pay the price for this confrontation. The price the US will be forced to pay Israel must be less than the reward it will reap from avoiding *confrontation*.

The proponents of the oversimplified reading always remember President Eisenhower as a "hero" because of his opposition to the tripartite aggression against Egypt in 1956, and because he was concerned with showing the world that the US administration's decisions were not shackled by a pro-Israel lobby. Eisenhower's decision was justified in terms of the political context of the time, but we often come across Arab political writers who still long for another Eisenhower in the White House.

The Suez Crisis was a golden opportunity for the US to put its foot down and confirm its uncontested leadership of the West, thus seriously challenging the role of France and Britain. The two powers came to realise that their heyday on the world political scene had come to an end. On the other hand, the Suez Crisis induced the US president to take action in order to avoid direct confrontation with the Soviet Union and an angry Arab world, which could have led to a political or possibly military conflict with incalculable consequences.

In other words, the US will only adopt political policies unshackled by the pro-Israel lobby in the event that a crisis threatening vital American interests occurs, or if, in a non-crisis situation, the US's failure to avoid confrontation with Israel is preferable to the risks entailed by such a confrontation.

While the ideological reading is losing ground, it continues to enjoy a following from the leftist and nationalist streams. It is built on the assumption that the Arab-US conflict is a logical necessity due to the ideological conflict between states which reflects on international relations. The key assumption for the ideological reading is that Israel is the "outpost of US imperialism." The cultural reading adopted by extremist religious movements draws on the same assumption except that, for the Islamists, the confrontation with the "Great Satan" is even more pervasive and thoroughgoing; for the Islamist movements, the conflict is a natural and continuous state of affairs — an all-out war.

The fourth reading, which is not vastly different from the first, may be described *as the idealistic reading and is opposed to* the confrontational readings above. The idealistic reading stems from admiration of and support for the US, but may at times include disappointment and resentment.

This reading draws its rationale from the scale of US interests in the Arab region. Because the US acts to protect its many vital interests in this area, and because the Arab stance is legally and morally justified, the US must realise that its best interests are served by adopting policies which are in harmony with the Arab stance.

These four different Arab readings of US policies, therefore, may be summed up as follows. The first considers the conflict with the US as the exception, even though it is perpetuated by Israel and its US allies; the second and third readings consider strategic conflict as the rule; while the fourth reading considers harmony in Arab-US policies to be the rule with the acknowledgment that discord is a long-term current exception.

On the other hand, there are several US readings of Arab policies, but only one reading dominates all levels of US political decision-making as far as Arab issues are concerned. The US reading is based on the assumption that, in its relations with Arabs, it is dealing with a disparate set of nations, fragmented in terms of society and polity, and for which exchange is not a priority. This reading is not always the result of ignorance, but in most cases points to a deliberate and informed political choice regarding the envisaged form of Arab-US relations.

The most indicative example of this reading is the US's exasperation and intolerance of Arab solidarity over issues which the US does not endorse. The US reading does not take into account the specificity of the Arab regional system, even in times of decline and fragility; nor does it admit the existence of certain shared standards of legitimacy which tend to reinforce solidarity, even to a minimal extent. This conceptual breakdown is particularly evident in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the peace process, particularly as regards the normalisation of relations by states which, insofar as they are Arab nations and regardless of geographical location, are *involved in the peace process, whether directly* or indirectly. The US perceives these parties in the strict legal sense, as having no role.

Could these very different but intricately entwined readings be reconciled? A few points may be mentioned here.

The Arab-Israeli conflict and the peace process which has followed it constitute the major field for interaction between the various readings and their testing grounds.

Before the Arab-Israeli conflict erupted, the Arabs viewed the US mainly as a state with no record of colonialism in the region, unlike the European powers. The missionary schools and President Wilson's call for the right to self-determination were welcomed by people under colonialist rule, to the extent that certain Arab countries during the Versailles Conference had affirmed that, if the mandate system was to be imposed, then an American mandate would be desirable. With the establishment of Israel and the beginning of the Cold War, however, this reading gave way to the ideological reading, concomitant with the development of Arab nationalism. The eighties were marked by an ideological blend of oversimplification and idealism at the level of Arab elite political thought. The idealistic reading came into its own with the initiation of the peace process in Madrid.

Both Arab and US readings are buttressed by values rooted in the respective political and cultural contexts of Arabs and Americans, which implies a whole host of contradictions.

Both the ideological and the conspiracy readings allow for a very superficial analysis of the political situation. US political culture, on the other hand, is based on self-interest and empirical experience; situations are evaluated according to the yardstick of US interest in terms of cost-benefit analysis, without the least consideration for passions or sentiments.

The US reading is rooted in a culture of easy solutions and the refusal to recognise the impossible — the attributes of a culture of optimism and reflections of the historical emergence of the US. The dogmatic readings each party employs in its dealings with the other are consolidated by a pervasive lack of mutual *understanding. Each party, however, claims to* understand the other; but this is an understanding derived from fixed stereotypes and based on an arbitrary selection of experiences or fixed ideological convictions.

In order to emerge from the impasse in Arab-US relations, three courses of action are suggested:

Centres and research programmes must be established in universities and Arab regional research institutes to further the Arabs' knowledge of the US.

Arab-American dialogues bringing together participants from various sectors of society will allow both the Arabs and the Americans to enhance their understanding of the other's concerns.

An agenda of goals considered realistic within the scope of those relations must also be drawn up.

Unless these measures are adopted, the misunderstanding which mars Arab-American relations, caused by the conflict between the maximum we demand and the minimum which the US offers, will persist. We will remain lost in labyrinths of the hopes invested in the US, torn between despair, disappointment in false messiahs, and resentment at the sole remaining superpower.

The writer is an affiliate professor of political science at the American University in Cairo.

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah

Out of its misery

A Palestinian statelet in Gaza, linked to Israeli settlement-and-byroad-besieged Palestinian cantons on the West Bank, has no armed forces but, instead, a brutal police force whose main task is to protect "Jewish" security and the petty-tyrants sworn to defend it. It is denied the right to conduct foreign policy or economic relations without Israeli sanction, and depends for its economic survival on hand-outs from Europe and the US. The hand-outs, especially the American ones, are tied, with many complicated knots, to the good behaviour of the Palestinian people, and not just their government, towards everything Israeli, including the hooligan settlers in their midst.

This statelet may or may not be declared a state. It may lie on most of Gaza and 40 — or 45 — per cent of the West Bank. It may not, however, have any foothold in the ever-expanding "eternal and undivided capital" of the so-called Jewish state, though it may pick an adjacent village, "develop" it with appropriate mansions, places of worship and night-clubs and call it Al-Quds. It categorically may not open the doors of the Palestinian statelet to the nearly four million diaspora Palestinians, but it may have a couple of airports and a seaport through which its assortment of VIPs can move in and out in due ostentation.

It is a state, then, with the benefit of a flag, a national anthem, a repressive apparatus and, most important, a president, a presidential bureau, an appropriate number of presidential palaces, guards, intelligence services, etc. — but a state surrounded on all sides by Israeli armed forces — posted and waiting even on the opposite side of the West Bank, along the Jordan River, as well as within its ephemeral borders, "protecting" the settlements and cruising up and down the massive "byroads" which already have swallowed up a huge chunk of Palestinian land.

It is a state which has no control over its foreign, domestic or economic affairs, and which is subject to Israeli dictates in everything it does — except, perhaps in how its governing elite accumulates and disposes of its personal wealth; it can be starved to submission at will and, having no borders to defend and no armed forces to defend them, can be reconquered in a day, if considerations of Israeli "security" require it.

No one has any doubt that this is exactly what lies at the end of the current "peace process". The Israelis, Likud and Labour, make no bones about revealing it. Labour merely shows more tact. That the principal difference between Likud and Labour visions of a final settlement is one of tact has been expressed openly by Labour's leaders on many occasions, especially during the current crisis caused by the construction of a Jewish settlement on Palestinian land in Jebel Abu Ghneim.

Everyone knows what lies at the end of the current peace process. The Israelis and the Americans know it — and both urge the Arabs to learn even more realism; the Palestinians know it, and the rest of the Arabs know it. So what exactly are we up to, rushing hither and thither, hell bent on reviving a process whose conclusion is so clearly predetermined? Of course, since the peace process was launched some two decades ago — the sheer number of days it has consumed is staggering in itself — the accent has been on process rather than on peace.

I have tried in previous articles to show that this is an inherent characteristic of the attempt to reach an Arab-Israeli settlement, constructed by the Americans and their Israeli allies as a process. The logic of the process is to divest the Palestinians and the Arabs of each and every element which once made up their bargaining strength; force them to negotiate from increasingly weaker positions; create new facts whereby terms the Palestinians and the Arabs rejected yesterday are transformed into their ultimate, barely reachable hope today; always collect in advance whatever pressure cards the Palestinians and Arabs seem to be holding, and once that is done, to ask for more. The insatiable needs of Israeli security are never satisfied.

A process like this takes place over time. It takes time to be absorbed fully by the vortex into which the Palestinian and Arab parties are being dragged, always weaker, always learning new lessons in abject realism, continuously setting their sights lower, constantly adapting to ever-higher levels of defeat and humiliation. Vested interests spring up which make it increasingly impossible to extricate oneself from the process — to do so would spell political suicide and, hence, there is no option but to go on, to be dragged in even deeper.

There is a bottom, however. By its very nature, the peace process could for many years not only survive, but require crises, halts and even wars and massacres. But the road, long and winding, twisting and turning, ultimately has to reach an end. And this is precisely why the current crisis in the two-decade long peace process, triggered by Netanyahu's construction of a Jewish quarter in Jebel Abu Ghneim, is different from any of its predecessors. Indeed, both Netanyahu, who came to power a year ago, and Har Homa, whose construction began nearly four months ago, appear more as creatures of that inherent crisis than its creators.

This crisis is simply that we have been witnessing the death throes of the peace process. It is, moreover, a natural death. No longer needed, the peace process has simply exhausted its life span. Netanyahu did not come to power in Israel to kill the peace process, but to witness its inevitable demise — to oversee its burial.

It is not by mere chance that an Israeli prime minister is only now waving a detailed blueprint, maps attached, of a final settlement, boasting that his is the first Israeli government to discuss such a detailed plan. Nor is it surprising that, 30 years after the June War, the Allon Plan, drawn in its wake, is being brought out of the drawer where it has lain collecting dust for three decades, or, for that matter, that a "plus" is being attached to it. It is, furthermore, only natural that an American president, in his second and last term, should show such total disdain for Arab sensibilities as Bill Clinton has done. Why should the American Congress *not* bow and scrape before Netanyahu and kick the Arabs in the face at every possible chance?

The current crisis of the peace process is a death crisis. But that death is due, not to the failure of the process, but to its resounding success. It is dying, simply and plainly, because it has fulfilled its promise. Why, then, rush to and fro, link up life-support systems, and try desperately to keep the heart beating and the lungs breathing, though each and every brain scan reveals a flat line — one which points directly towards Netanyahu's Allon-Plus maps?

Salama Ahmed Salama put it succinctly in his column *Close Up* in last week's issue of the *Weekly*: "All the parties involved in the peace process have agreed that the negotiations, even if they have virtually collapsed, serve their respective interests and, therefore, must continue. This could be the only reason for which the peace process has not been buried yet."

Arms and the woman

David Blake encounters Medicis and other important folk



Michelangelo's Lorenzo di Medici

Piano recital Marcelle Matta and Elena Dzamachveli with soprano Amira Selim; Cairo Opera House, Small Hall, 12 June

Liszt was not gay, they say, but his music often is — not merry but gay. He knew everyone who mattered in Europe when Europe mattered and wandered everywhere like a great Hungarian sheep-dog.

Liszt was a sportive galaxy on his own. Like Byron, he had beauty, genius and the world of art and fashion at his feet — he even had God. No one put him down, neither popes nor Wagner. But above all things Liszt had the piano, and before it he could be anything.

The opening piece of music in Marcelle Matta's interesting concert was intended as a musical representation of a man of great power, inspired by Lorenzo di Medici — or more precisely Michelangelo's tomb to Lorenzo — a man who, more or less, inherited the high renaissance as a family bequest.

The aim of this concert was to equate music to the visual arts, especially painting. It is an old story, as old as art itself, endlessly debated by ancient Greeks. But the idea of a close connection between the two is spurious. Painting has definite limitations, music has none. A painting is a ME sign, music is YOU. The musical composer goes only a certain distance with the notes then, as Strauss said, the Divine takes over.

In this opening piece, Liszt brings himself, death and the crumbling of might and majesty to an end, a rich menu which Marcelle Matta did her best to deliver. As a pianist, she has a solid tone which she uses like wall-to-wall carpet. It covers everything, and for the dragon-flying Liszt in sombre mood it will not do. The playing needs that bit of vulgarity, native and loveable in Liszt, to add a pinch of piquant sound to it. If only Matta had this touch. Without it the soliloquy went flat and Lorenzo stuck fast to his pedestal. No need to worry because Mme Matta herself did not. She hurried happily on to the next piece.

This was the Spozalitzio, a view of Raphael's Marriage of the Virgin. Liszt in other colours, pale and sedate, linked to perfect sunlight with the gracious bending figures of holy people in happy mood, before the storms beset them. The music has clever suggestions of the carefully laid perspectives which set the event in space not earthly. This suited Matta better than the *vanitas* of the first piece. Her tone had lightened.

For each piece of music presented we were given a large-screen projection of something, a supposed equivalent of what we were hearing. Sometimes it worked, but mostly it did not. The music played on wings of space and song, but the pictures were merely stuck there on the wall like a dull hanging.

The third piece was composed by Enrico Granados, appealing salon music for which a painting by Goya, that pace-setter in bedroom and art gallery, was projected. We had merry dancers and also his great love, the frisky Duchess of Alba, lying prone on a day-bed in see-through lycra to add a breath of soft-porn to the Matta journey. Alba, as painted by Goya, was a slight, neat, rather pert little thing, at odds with her reputation as a voracious man-eater gorging her way through the various strata of Spanish life. Matta's piano playing of the Nightingale music in section three was the best of the concert.

No 4 was Moussorgsky's orchestral piece *Pictures from an Exhibition*, later arranged for solo piano. It shows iconic scenes and buildings from Russian history. The piano covers vast ranges of time and place and is difficult to play. Matta chose the most difficult of all: three scenes, one called Catacombs, then another Baba Yaga, ending the series with The Great Gate at Kiev. All this is heavy stuff for the player, and Mme Matta got lost, but she stuck it out and ended rather wearily staggering through the celebrated gates. It was brave of her, but even her tone sounded thin for what was needed: the heroic thuds of the sound of Ghengis Khan's hordes battering on the door.

No 5, 6 and 7 were all by Debussy. He was a literary composer, but whether or not his music can be attached to the paintings chosen seemed doubtful. Monet was paired with *La cathedral engloutie*, Watteau with *L'isle joyeuse* and Velázquez with *En blanc et noir*.

En blanc et noir was a bad fit for Velázquez. His stupendously subtle painting of King Philip of Spain and his family, mostly greys and pale, smudged whites, is one of the visualisations with which even music cannot compete. Music is hard put to represent silence. But that is the word for *Las Meninas*. Debussy's music anyway is monotonous and repetitive and provides only small change when faced with the mystery of the Velazquez. Matta plodded, and so did her helper, the pianist Elena Dzamachveli in this long two-piano duet.

We had come to the end of Marcelle Matta's saga. She is a maddening person. Charm oozes from her. She forgets her lines, loses direction, concentration — everything falters. Then she picks up, moves off through her music and ends with childish, elementary directness, expecting praise. She usually gets it. Flowers and love surround her.

She has wisdom. She is a very clever director of other people's talents. She has nurtured splendid pianists, Yasser Mukhtar and Ahmed Abu Zahra among them. Her Brahms commemoration concert earlier this year, with Mukhtar, was a success. Brahms suits her. So does really rugged 20th century music which she seldom plays. She is way out on the music scene, so her wayward style with conventional classic material should be tolerated. She's happy, and nothing is going to step in her path. So what might have been a comedy of errors becomes a summer show of elation. There is nothing soft-backed about her.

As end piece came Amina Selim, soprano. She is very young, pretty and slender as a flower stalk. The voice is clear, ranging over many octaves. She is clever, has feeling and loves words, but needs middle-range power. First she gave Gounod's Marguerite from *Faust*. The role and this air are really big soprano — no canary bird will do. In the runs up the range to the ultimate high trills at the climaxes she lacked push. Marguerite is ecstatic in this music about the beauty of the jewels set before her by the Devil to bring her misery. Selim showed none of this.

Musetta in Puccini's *La Boheme* was better, truer, but somehow Selim seemed too thin for the rowdy, loveable girl she enacted. In the repeat of the famous tune, she failed to get the slanchio into the music. Best was Bernstein. Cunegonde's song Glitter and be Gay, from the musical *Candide*, suited her present style. Irony and ease with the high range of the notes showed her future capabilities. A middle voice and roles abroad await her. Roles are better than flowers.

Cinema



Everything's coming up mushrooms

Hani Mustafa is on the edge of his seat — sometimes — during *Eish El-Ghurab*

Nur El-Sherif and Youssra in *Eish El-Ghurab* (Mushroom)

In *Eish El-Ghurab* (Mushroom), director and scriptwriter Samir Seif consolidates his already established reputation as an action film-maker. The scenario, by Salah Fouad, observes all the traditional rules of the genre. Suspense is maintained throughout, with the spectator left in the dark even about the significance of the title.

The film opens with a scene in which Azza El-Mansouri (played by Youssra) is being interviewed by a satellite channel about her recent appointment as Egypt's representative to the UN. Her daughter, who had accompanied her to the interview, is lured off the set by the director (played by Mahmoud Qabil) who proceeds to drug and kidnap her. Azza phones her husband (played by Ezzat Abu Ouf) — a businessman who at the time of the interview is out of town, visiting a holiday village in the south of Sinai that he owns. He receives the news with a suspicious calm. She then contacts Mustafa (Nur El-Sherif) her first husband, the girl's father. He is an improbable action hero — a one time bodyguard to the late President Sadat so traumatised by the assassination and his failure to fulfil his mission that he rapidly sank into alcoholism. That was when the divorce happened. But lo and behold, he is now ready to assume his role as lifesaver. Why should the hero have such a cumbersome past? His new mission is obviously not suited to his capabilities. Enter a redundant supporting character: Radwan (played by Mustafa Metwalli), Mustafa's one-time army trainer.

Many of the details in Mushroom seem superfluous, even when they are handled with technical virtuosity. This becomes most evident in the scene where Azza visits her ex-husband and finds that he has sunk back into alcoholism — a scene that appears to be included solely because it provides the opportunity for some flashy editing as the camera juxtaposes images from a violent action film on the TV screen in Mustafa's living room with pseudo-documentary footage of Sadat's assassination. Technically impressive but a bit contrived.

Other details work somewhat better. The close-ups in the opening scene are extremely effective and contribute to the suspense — which is what seemingly insignificant details are for in an action/suspense film. Close-up on the pocket camera carried by Azza's daughter. Cut to the tense and anxious expression on the director's face as he observes her snapping away.

Sometimes the piling on of details is a little too slow though establishing the daughter's diabetes in the context of a kidnapping situation is undoubtedly an important ingredient in the generation of suspense. It gives the kidnappers leverage and adds a twist to the usual threats. Unfortunately the cinematic significance of the girl's diabetes is not helped by the rather crass assertion that ex-husband makes when he insists that their daughter's illness is a result of her being neglected by her mother in favour of completing her Ph.D.

One of the elements of suspense is the title, "Mushroom", the significance of which is revealed more than half-way through the film. The reason why the daughter is kidnapped, we are told, is that the kidnappers want her step-father to sell them his "*mushrooms*". Only much later do we discover that the mushrooms are actually a quantity of radio-active plutonium the step-father has bought from Russia, with the intention of re-selling to the highest-bidder. Nuclear explosions make mushroom clouds. This is the connection.

Soon after, the kidnappers are revealed to be CIA agents intent on ensuring that the plutonium does not fall into enemy hands. But the plot thickens further. The step-father's bodyguard turns out to be an Israeli agent who, in due course, captures both plutonium and daughter with the intention of taking them to Eilat — a highly contrived twist.

Despite the convoluted plot, however, the director managed to sustain the spectator's interest with a sensitive handling of the tempo. The desert surveillance scenes in Sinai are a good example. The close-ups of camels and various desert creatures break the monotony of the long, necessarily slow sequence.

. The film contains excellent performances. Youssra, as the distraught mother growing suspicious of her husband and reliving some of her old feelings towards her ex-husband, delivers an accomplished performance matched by Nur El-Sherif's portrayal of the machinations and mannerisms of the alcoholic.

The choice of setting for the last scene, close to Saladin's fortress, was not inappropriate, but one wishes the director had refrained from making a major-general extol the glories of the Arab leader.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Valparaíso
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, Alexandria annex, 101 El-Horreya Avenue, Alexandria.
An exhibit of lithographs, postcards and photographs.

Mustafa Nabhas (Paintings)
Donia Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, Borg El-Arabba', Bab El-Louk. Tel 355 8367. Daily exc Fri, 12pm-9pm. Until 19 June.
Works under the title " Gypsies in Egypt".

Cartoons from Egypt and Europe
British Council, 192 El-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 303 1514. Until 19 June.
Over 150 cartoons on display.

Galal El-Husseini (Watercolours)
Cairo Atelier, 2 Karim El-Dawla St, Antiquekhana. Tel 574 6730. Daily 10am-1.30pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 20 June.

From The Darkroom (Photographs)
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 26 June.
The fifth annual photographic exhibition by the Journalism and Mass Communication darkroom workshop.

Farahat Zaki (Pastels)
Centre for International Cultural Cooperation, 11 Shagarat El-Dorr St, Zamalek. Tel 341 5419. Daily 10am-3pm & 4pm-9pm. Until 26 June.

Second Triennale of Graphic Arts
Zamalek Centre of Arts, 1 El-Maahad El-Swissri St, Zamalek Tel 340 8211 and the Museum of Modern Egyptian Art, Opera House grounds. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 28 June.

Ghada Amer (Drawings)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 29 June.

Mohamed Rizq (Sculpture)
Cairo Opera Gallery, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily 10am-2pm & 7.30-10.30pm. 22 June until the end of the month.
Hammered copper and iron works.

Claire Zahnd
Mubarak Public Library premises, 4 El-Tahawia St, off El-Nil St, Giza. Tel 336 0291. Daily exc Tues, 11am-7pm. 19 June-4 July.
Books, etchings, lithographs and calligraphic works under the title Singular-Plural.

Collective Exhibition
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 4.30pm-9pm. Until 5 July.
Hassan Abdel-Fattah, Omar Abdel-Zaher, Fathy Afify, Hassan El-Sharq, Emad Ibrahim, Ahmed Selim and Mohamed Ozaby.

Suzanne Mubarak Children's Museum
34 Abu Bakr El-Seddiq St, Heliopolis. Tel 249 9915. Daily exc Mon, 9am-2pm.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalils and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared. There are also a number of excellent orientalist works.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.
The world's largest collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the ancient Egyptians, along with, of course, the controversial mummies room. A perennial must.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artefacts, including textiles, manuscripts, icons and architectural features in a purpose built structure in the heart of the Coptic city.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluke periods and from other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

French Films
French Cultural Centre, Heliopolis annex, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Ismailia Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824.
19 June, 8pm: Rien Du Tout, directed by Cedric Klapisch (1992). Starring Fabrice Luchini and Maria Riva.
22 June, 8pm: Une Vie, directed by Alexandre Astruc (1958). Starring Maria Schell, Christian Macquand and Ivan Desny.
French Cultural Centre, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Feransiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679.
23 June, 5pm: Pour La Peau D'Un Flic, directed by Alain Delon (1981). Starring Alain Delon, Anne Parillaud and Jean-Pierre Darras.
25 June, 8pm: Bob Le Flambeur, directed by Jean-Pierre Melville (1956). Starring Gerard Buhr, Daniel Cauchy and Claude Cerval.

The Avenger and the Thief
Maulana Abul-Kalam Azad Centre for Indian Culture, 27 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5162. 19 June, 4.30pm.
With Amitab Bachchan.

Film of the month
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St (ex-Bustan), off Tahrir Sq. Tel 575 9877. 19 June, 7pm.
Screening of a film selected by visitors to the institute.

Indian Film Festival
The latest Indian films, including films for children, will be screened at the Heliopolis Cultural Palace from 23-30 June. For more information, contact the Information Service of the Indian Embassy, 37 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5243.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Romeo and Juliet
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm.
An adaptation of William Shakespeare's dramatic language to a very contemporary setting replete with black leather jackets and neon lights.

The Devil's Own
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
With Brad Pitt and Harrison Ford.



Cartoons at the British Council

Space Jam
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Basketball superstar Michael Jordan co-stars with Bugs Bunny.

Sungam II
New Odeon I, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Double Impact
New Odeon III, as above. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Van Damme.

Warlock
New Odeon II, as above. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Julian Sands.

Il Postino
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Massimo Troisi and Philippe Noiret.

Twelve Monkeys
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Brad Pitt, among many other excellent actors.

Phenomenon
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Thur-Sat, midnight.
With John Travolta.

Jack
MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Robin Williams

Toffaha (A Girl Called Apple)
Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 934 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Leila Elwi and Magued El-Masri.

Eish El-Ghorab (Mushroom)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Nour El-Sherif and Youssra.

Bekhit Wa Adila II (Bekhit and Adila II)
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Adel Imam and Sherine.

Emra'a Wa Khamsat Regal (A Woman and Five Men)
Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.
With Fifi Abdou, of course.

DANCE

Silence
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. Until 24 June, exc 21 June, 9pm.
Performed by the Cairo Opera Dance Theatre and directed by Walid 'Aouni.

MUSIC

Music Festival
French Cultural Centre, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Feransiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 21 June. (Programme subject to change)
5pm, Patio: Mohamed Abdel-Wahab Orchestra, Helwan University.
5.30pm, Auditorium: Piano recital with Viviana Boscolo.
6pm, Mediatheque: String trio, Helwan University.
6.30pm, Patio: Popular repertoire, jamming session.
7.30pm, Patio: Amateurs perform.
7.30pm, Auditorium: Traditional Arabic takht performing urban varieties from the 1940s and 50s.
8.30pm, Auditorium: Soufi performance.
9.30pm, Courtyard: Fathi Salama with the Gozour band of Egyptian jazz.
10.30pm, Patio: Paoli rock group.
11pm, Courtyard: Jazz trio performing on the saxophone (Cretien), double-bass (Zino) and drums (Piccinelli).
11.30pm, Courtyard: Rachid Bahry, with the jazz trio.
1.30am, Courtyard: "Boeuf Musical"

Arabic Music Ensemble
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 19 June, 9pm.
Conducted by Salah Ghobashi.

The National Arabic Music Ensemble and The Cairo Opera Children's Choir
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 19 & 20 June, 9pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

Images from the South of Spain
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 20 June, 9pm and the Garden of the Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746. 21 June, 9pm.
Performed by the trio Boborquez (piano), Gil (violoncello) and Garbajosa (clarinet).

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 21 June, 9pm.
Compositions by Tchaikovsky, Weber and Mendelssohn, with soloist Medhat Abdel-Salam on the violin; under Swiss conductor Boris Perenoud.

Cairo Opera Orchestra
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya Sq, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 21 June, 9pm.
Premiere of compositions by Sherif Mohieddin, Khaled Shoukry and Nader Abbassy; conducted by Ivan Filev.

Music from Chechyna
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 21 June, 9pm.

Piano and Violin Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 22 June, 9pm.
With Othman El-Mahdy.

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Main Summer Theatre, Opera House, as above. 24 June, 9pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

THEATRE

Le'b 'Eyal (Children's Play)
George Abyad Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 9.30pm.
With Mona Zaki, Khaled El-Nabawi and Rania Farid Shawqi.

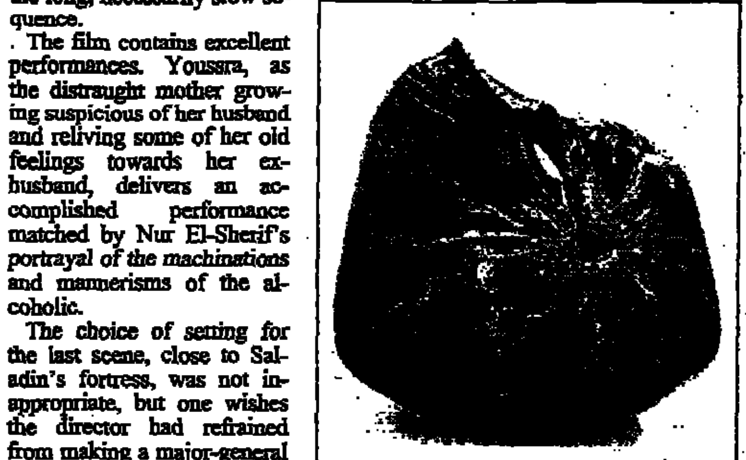
Mama America
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, Qasr El-Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Wed & Thur 10pm, Fri 8pm.
Starring and directed by Mohamed Sobhy.

'A'elat Wanis (Wanis' Family)
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, as above. Sat & Sun, 10pm, Mon 8pm.
With Mohamed Sobhy.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by ***Injy El-Kashef***

Around the galleries



Amina Ebeid

RURAL Egyptian landscapes form the subject matter of elegant, technically accomplished *paintings* by **Youssef Raafat** currently on show at **Extra Gallery**. Sharing the gallery space are ceramic pieces — abstract sculptures and vessels — by **Amina Ebeid**.

Douroub Gallery hosts sculptures and ceramics in a wide variety of materials by the following artists: **Mohamed Mandour, Tahani El-Adli, Zeinat Abdel-Gawwad, Ahmed El-Sayed, Mabrouk Ismail Mabrouk, Abduh Ramzi, Mourad Fakhr El-Din, Abdel-Aziz Saad, Samir Shoukri and Ibrahim Abdel-Malak.** Worth noting is that many of the works on show are by artists without formal training.

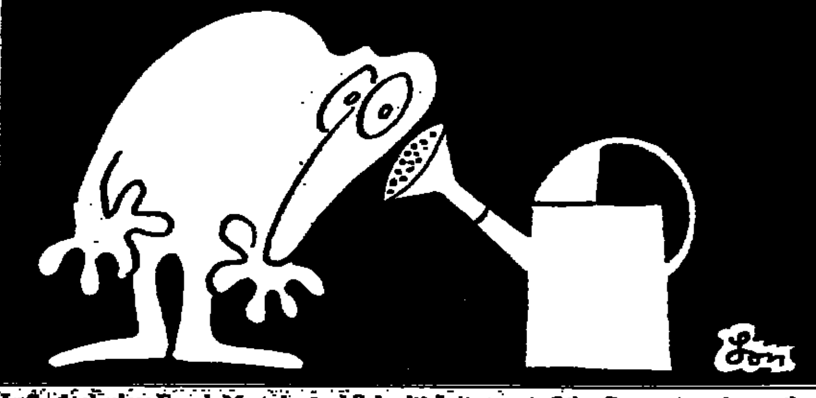
The **Fustat Ceramics Centre** is worth a visit. Apart from housing both permanent and changing ceramics exhibitions, the Centre itself, designed by Gamal Amer, a pupil of Hassan Fathi, is interesting architecturally. Recently, the Centre has expanded to include a glassmaking unit in addition to its numerous ateliers for ceramicists.

Reviewed by ***Nagwa El-Ashri***









Left, clockwise: Frank Mrowka and Schmidt Jutta, part of the German section at the Triennale, Daniel Aguila, Mexico, and Lars Olsson, Swedish cartoonist

Nigel Ryan explores the Second Cairo Print Triennale, an exuberant exhibition worth visiting time and time again

Reading the fine print

The Second Cairo International Print Triennale is a far from modest affair. Occupying two of the Ministry of Culture's most important venues, the Akhenaten galleries of the Centre for Arts, Zamalek and the Museum of Modern Egyptian Art in the Opera House grounds, it brings together the works of 550 artists from 76 countries.

The logistics of organising such an exhibition are formidable, and it is almost inevitable that some aspects of the display should have gone a little awry. With such a vast number of works to display in what is, after all, a limited space, those responsible for hanging have, in reality, very few options. It is a case, quite simply, of cramming everything in, and in order to do this with a semblance of order the organisers adopted the simple expedient of hanging artists from the same countries in the same spaces. The only other possible principle of ordering would have been to sub-divide exhibits according to technique, a procedure that has both advantages and disadvantages. This, though, can only be a minor quibble, since what Cairo has in the Triennale is a major exhibition, and a gold, old fashioned exhibition at that.

In the Centre of Arts, at least, the effect is reminiscent of Watteau's celebrated view of an early 18th century gallery — painted, incidentally, as a kind of proto advertisement poster — with pictures hanging all over the place, clamouring for the attention of the spectator. The Akhenaten galleries thus become a space through which the visitor can browse. And, since it is impossible to take in everything in a single viewing, for the first time in several years Cairo boasts an exhibition to which it is a pleasure to return for several visits.

Any review of the triennale is bound to be little more than a scratching of the surface. The number of works, the diversity of techniques, the varied origins of the artists and the traditions within which they practice mitigate against the possibility of any coherent overview. Nor, in an exhibition that so exuberantly celebrates diversity, would it be a useful exercise to attempt to identify emergent trends or seek to impose a thematic taxonomy. There is simply too much on show to render any such reductionism remotely possible, let alone useful. And this, in turn, has the effect of forcing the spectator back to basics, back to looking at the images that hang on the walls, back, indeed, to the eye, furnishing a salutary lesson at a time when — somewhat ironically given the rhetoric of post-modernism — it is all too easy to enter a gallery knowing precisely what one is going to see and to leave that gallery having only confirmed the prejudices with which one entered.

The weighting of the exhibits is, in many ways, predictable. Germany fields over 100 artists, while the entire first floor of the Centre for Arts is allocated to the Japanese contingent, containing the work of 35 artists. Both countries, of course, have strong graphic traditions, and perhaps the vitality of contemporary practice in both countries is rooted in the depth of those traditions. Certainly, in both Japan and Germany, there is a great deal of canonical work against which to react, though shared starting points lead to multiple destinations.

In the case of Japan the overbearing weight of tradition and the almost impossible refinement of the woodcut has resulted in a vehement refusal, on the part of most artists, to enter into a discourse with the past. Traditional subject matter and techniques are avoided almost as a matter of course. In some cases the results are more than trite — Risho Shigeo's fantastic city scapes, high tech cathedrals floating atop suspended ovoids — are retro-kitsch sci-fi, comic book versions of a future that never was, dredged from the thirties and forties, though far more often the direction is towards a minimalist abstraction in which surface marks become little more than scratches implicating, though by no means signifying, meanings. A far more convincing strategy to escape a past dominated by the view of a single volcano and the breaking of a single wave, is to address the contemporary urban environment head on, which is precisely the route taken by Kaoru Ueda. Alternatively one might opt for Western inspired conversation pieces, giving the still-life an added, detective novel twist by merely suggesting elements of the *objet typif* — holes in a semi sphere (lute or guitar?), pieces of driftwood — and then calling the piece Missing Object, which is Marino Mayumi's ploy.

Yet among the most beautiful exhibits on the first floor of the Centre of Arts are those that tackle tradition head on. Katsunori Hamanishi manages an almost unbearable tension in three perfect depictions of a single bough, denuded of blossom, cutting across the picture plane. In one case the branch is broken and bound with steel twine, in other examples it is accompanied by taught steel rope. Backgrounds are sombre, details exquisite, a muted, almost abstracted vocabulary that with the minimum of conceit contrives the same impact and treads the same ground as the overblown Japanese photo-panels of Gilbert and George.

Junichi Morimoto, despite a self-consciously high tech approach to medium, also chooses to tackle the heritage of the woodcut head on with two extraordinary photo-prints of handmade paper on which twisted pieces of wire and splashes of white paint have been placed. The result is to replicate the formal qualities of the woodcut, flattening the three dimensional in favour of an emphasis on the integrity of the picture plane in exactly the way that so excited European artists when, in the mid to late 19th century, they were first exposed to Japanese art.

Unfortunately some of the exhibits in the Japanese section have been reduced to anonymity. Name cards are merely blu-tacked next to the works to which they refer and, as might be expected, some of the cards have fallen off. Hence, in the most distant gallery a striking photo montage of a sepia tinted head, in profile but severely cropped to reveal only details of the hair and a hand held up to the cheek, and torn in one corner to allow for the superimposition of a patch of scarlet, is now unattributed. This is not the case, though, with Toshimo Kitono, whose works have attracted one of the little gold stickers that regularly punctuate the exhibition, indicating that one of the seemingly innumerable prizes in the gift of the jury has been awarded. And awarded for what? In Kitono's case for whiplash violet lines that dissect the sepulchral black, punctuated otherwise only by floating geometric shapes that lurk beneath residual landscapes.

If Germany's printmakers have managed to escape the dictates of expressionism, it is alive and kicking in South and Central America, albeit it with, on occasion, a magical realist overlay. No such fudging, though, in Argentinian José Rueda's work. The gouged lino cut lends a startling directness to his anatomising of fascism as three goose stepping figures point accusing fingers right, left and centre, in desperate search for scapegoats.

The influence of the expressionist woodcut is also evident in Leonardo Gotleyb's forbidding urban jungles, constructed out of the restrictive geometries of scaffolding, grid like structures that serve as obvious metaphors for entrapment. Quotations become even more direct in the work of Mauricio Schvarzman — an Argentinian whose name gives away at least something of the game — whose woodcut updating of the Last Supper has definite nueu sachlikiet origins, the central figure surrounded by twelve acolytes, one in black tie, several others in Mafioso hats. Silvera Grasela's shrouded figures struggling across a bleak landscape, however, looks further north for inspiration, dragging the Scandinavian angst of Munch across the South American pampas.

The American room — first left, ground floor, Centre for Arts — was perhaps a little disappointing. Deena Des Rioux's clever photographic juxtapositions looked a little too much like seventies post-cards, though Nicola Uribe Benninghoff's etchings recalled the high points of 19th century illustration, a homage, perhaps, to Goya, though via Gustav Doré.

Some of the gold stickers appended to works seemed a little inexplicable. Moroccan artist El-Hashemi Azza's predictable conceits — a hand outstretched with mouth set in the palm, a head bisected to reveal three rats within the hollow skull — technically accomplished, were just too un-shocking. Far more appealing are Syrian Ali Selim lEl-Khaled's classical/renaissance compositions, all charging horses, cherubs and composite capitals, and Italian De Fillipi Fernando's reworking of alchemical symbols — angels, astronomical devices, flying horses and stars — which won a special jury prize.

One should not, however, carp. The organisers of the triennale are to be congratulated on the gargantuan efforts that have obviously gone into the making of this exhibition. And I can do no more than exhort readers to visit for themselves, not once, but several times.

A graphic theme continues at the British Council gallery where the Dutch embassy, as part of the Dutch presidency of the European Union, has organised an exhibition of cartoons in conjunction with the Federation of European Cartoonists' Organisations. Cartoonists from 22 countries display their work, with special sections devoted to Egypt seen through European eyes and to local products. An excellent idea, but one that somehow has not quite realised its potential. And why, one cannot help wondering, are cartoons such a male preserve.

For full details of exhibitions, see Listings opposite.

Plain Talk

If summer is something of a dry season on the cultural front it does have some advantages, this sudden dearth of activity. The lazy, hazy days of summer are a perfect opportunity to catch up on reading, an ideal time to peruse those volumes that one had always intended to, but somehow never found the time to read.

In recent years there has been a great debate around the idea of "the canon". There are many academics who think it is a myth, one which should be consigned to the waste-paper bin. I, however, believe otherwise. An ideal summer reading list might include both the well-established classics and less canonical works. It might begin with Homer's *Odyssey* and end with Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet.*

How many people have you met who will mention classic works and even quote from the better known passages and, when you question them more closely, you discover that they have probably never read them? We all have gaps in our reading, often quite embarrassing gaps, and summer is the perfect time to fill at least one or two. Given the heat one should perhaps not attempt anything too ambitious — *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* is possibly a little too louche for a desert climate — but this year I am determined, once and for all, to finish — is this an embarrassing admission? — George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and thoroughly intend to re-read Naguib Mahfouz's Cairo Trilogy.

In many newspapers it is a popular pastime to compile reading lists for the summer holidays, the kind of books that people might wish to take with them on a journey as an alternative to the kind of lurid paperbacks that have come to be termed, generically, airport fiction. And surely we can find something more appealing, even as light reading, than these soap operatic sagas that seem invariably to top the best-seller lists in the Western press.

A fascinating work I stumbled across last year, purchased, and never finished reading is *The Conference of the Birds* by Fariduddin Attar, one of the greatest Sufi poets from 12th century Persia. His work is considered one of the longest poems of Sufi literature and seems particularly relevant travel reading since it deals with the migration of birds, led by the hoopoe, in search of wisdom. The translation published by the Penguin Classics is an excellent one, as it seems to have retained the fluidity and maturity of the original work.

I am a great believer in the old adage that travel broadens the mind. Certainly, between Tolstoy's *War and Peace* , Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, and Malraux's *Man's Fate*, much cultural, ideological and geographical mileage is covered. When we read a novel, we do not only look at the sites of the land visited from the outside, but rather we live under the skins and inside the minds of its inhabitants. Two best-selling novels of the '90s, *The English Patient* and Louis de Bernières's *Corelli's Mandolin*, are excellent examples of cross-cultural reading experiences, of novels that enable us to have a foot in many different cultures at the same time.

If travel does indeed broaden the mind, by exposing us to cultures and habits of thought born of other traditions, what could be better than to compound that experience by supplementing it with reading, an activity that cannot only transcend national and cultural borders but which can also transport us across ages, defying the dictatorship of time?

Now is the time, I think, to select your summer reading. And even if you do not leave your armchair this summer, the right choice will ensure you embark on marvelous journeys.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Books

Boy dancers and Lord Cromer's paper

Mahmoud El-Wardani reviews the more important titles to have appeared in the last month

•***Al-Raqss Al-Sha'bi Fi Masr*** **(Folk Dancing in Egypt), Saad Al-Khadem. Cairo: Hai'at Qusour Al-Thaqafa, 1997**

The reprinting of this seminal book by Saad Al-Khadem, the late pioneer of folkloric studies, is indeed welcome. Drawing on literary sources as well as depictions on temples and textiles, Al-Khadem attempts to chart the dances that have now disappeared and to explore their religious and socio-cultural significance.

In the introduction, Al-Khadem posits that in Egypt, as in all ancient civilisations, dancing had its origins in religious ritual, as witnessed in the reliefs on temple and tomb walls in Luxor, Beni Hassan and Saqqara. Sources on later periods include Coptic textiles which show men and women dancing together and, in Islamic times, depictions on jewellery most of which date to the Fatimid period.

After this brief historical overview, the author draws comparisons between Egyptian, Spanish and Indian dances. He devotes much space to the ramifications of Mohamed Ali's banning of *awalem* (women dancers), from Cairo and Alexandria, where previously they had had syndicates and paid taxes. Among the consequences of Mohamed Ali's actions was the replacement of female dancers by boys and the decline of the special school close to Shabrakheit which had taught dance to village girls.

Among many dances once common in Egypt was "The Shield", performed by naked boys. In re-creating these dances, Al-Khadem draws on depictions on Coptic shrouds and historical descriptions of Coptic *mawaled*. Surprisingly, one depiction on a Coptic shroud corroborates Flaubert's seemingly fanciful report on an erotic dance he watched which he refers to as "The Bee" (a version of today's striptease), where the dancer pretends to have been bitten by a bee and discards her clothing. On one side of the shroud there are nine scenes showing a dancer gradually undressing.

The "squatting dance" dates back to Graeco-Roman times, as illustrated by statuettes showing a female figure sitting on the shoulders of the god Bess, among other things a patron of dance, her feet on his arms. This dance probably survived until quite recently; not only is it depicted on Coptic tapestries but also figures in popular manuscripts on magic.

Among the many strengths of Al-Khadem's book is the manner in which the often obscure chains of continuity, be it of dances or costumes, through the eras are traced. Among examples of the survival of costumes is a particular type of *galabiya* worn by Bedouin women in Sharqiya. Typified by long sleeves which start at the shoulder and gradually form into a bell-shape, this garment is very similar to one found in Fustat, dating back to the 15th century and also to a costume worn by a Fatimid dancer seen on a sherd of pottery. From orientalist sketches, it would appear that this *galabiya* was worn by dancers until the 19th century.

•***Sirat Al-Zahir Baibars*** **(The Epic of Al-Zahir Baibars). Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1997**

The fifth, and final, volume of *Sirat Al-Zahir Baibars* (The Epic of Al-Zahir Baibars), has finally been published by GEBO. The project is long overdue, and the epic has been out of print for several decades. The current text has been reproduced from Mustafa El-Sebe's 1923 edition.

Of the dozens of popular epics, that of Al-Zahir Baibars is distinguished by its Cairene ambience and exclusively Egyptian characterisations. The hero, Al-Zahir Baibars, is the only ruler from the Arab conquest to have attained such a mythical and hallowed place in the Egyptian collective memory. Listeners in cafés rejoiced at hearing tales of his exploits against the Crusaders and the Moghuls and felt consoled by the knowledge that he defended the poor and ultimately stood for justice.

•***Sunna' Al-Hadara Al-Ilmiya Fil-Islam*** **(Leaders of Islamic Enlightenment Civilisation), 2 vols, Ahmed Mohamed Abu Ouf. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1997**

In seeking to present milestones of Islamic civilisation, Mohamed Abu Ouf has cast his net wide. The figures he has chosen to write about in this miniature encyclopeadia include writers, philosophers, travellers, physicians, scientists and historians from different eras and various parts of the Arab world. The volume includes Abu Hayyan El-Tawhidi, Ibn Battuta, Ibn Hazm, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Tufail, Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Sina, Al-Farabi, Al-Kindi and Al-Massoudi, among others.

•***Ruwwad Fi Masirat Al-Tanwir*** **(Pioneers on the Path to Enlightenment), Othman Mohamed Al-Hassan. Cairo: Dar Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi, 1997**

This book presents eight profiles of prominent Sudanese personalities whom the author considers key-figures in the formulation of contemporary Sudanese national consciousness. Drawn from different milieu, the figures profiled include Mohieddin Saber, former director of the Arab Organisation for Education, Culture and Science, Mohamed Omar Bashir, the prominent educationalist, and Al-Fatteh Al-Nour, pioneer journalist.

•***Al-Muqqattam: Garidat Al-Ihtilal Al-Britani Fi Masr (Al-Muqqattam*****: The Pro-British Occupation in Egypt Newspaper), Tayssir Abu-Arga. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1997**

There is little doubt that *Al-Muqqattam* newspaper, launched on the order of Lord Cromer following the defeat of the Urabi Uprising, was a mouthpiece for the British occupiers in Egypt. This book analyses *Al-Muqqattam*'s position from 1889 when it was launched, through the First World War and up to the 1919 Revolution.

•***Al-Urban Wa Dawrahum Fi Al-Mugtama' Al-Masri*** **(The Bedouins and their Role In Egyptian Society), Iman Mohamed Abdel-Moneim. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1997**

In spite of their impact on modern Egyptian history, surprisingly few studies have been devoted to local Bedouin tribes. Iman Abdel-Moneim's in-depth study charts the history of these tribes up to the 19th century, emphasising their pre-eminent role under Ottoman rule. The author also analyses their mores and manners, highlighting the values of neighbourliness and kinship and the customs attendant on marriage and burial ceremonies.

•***Al-Dalil Al-Laghawi Al-'Am*** **(A General Linguistic Guide), Soliman Fayyad. Cairo: Dar Sharqiyat, 1997**

Soliman Fayyad, best known as a novelist, here turns his hand to a new area. His "General Linguistic Guide" is an alphabetically ordered compilation of Arabic words, expressions and constructions most often misused. Though it offers syntactical and semantic clues to correct usage, the guide is targeted towards the general reader and scrupulously avoids pedantry.

•***Al-Haraka Al-Islamiya Fil-'Asr Al-Hadith*** **(The Islamic Movement in Modern Times), Kamal Hamed Mugheith. Cairo: Markaz Al-Dirasat Wal-Maloumat Al-Qanounia Li-Hiqouq Al-Insan, 1997**

A very timely book in view of recent events, this volume highlights the close links between the Islamic movement in Egypt and its counterparts in the Arab world and beyond. The book is divided into two sections, the first of which traces the development of the Islamic movement in Egypt from the French expedition to Egypt to 1967, while the second tackles the movement's contemporary ideology.

'Because it hurts'

Non-governmental organisations are stepping up the battle against female genital mutilation on the legal and grassroots fronts. Dina Ezzat discusses new developments in the controversy

Non-governmental workers battling against female genital mutilation (FGM) have developed new strategies to face the potential reverse of a ministerial decree that bans the practice of the ritual in public and private hospitals and clinics.

This week, an administrative court is expected to issue a verdict on a ministerial decree banning the practice of FGM in all public and private hospitals and clinics.

Partisans on both sides of the fence are hoping that the verdict will go their way.

"We have always known that the battle against FGM is a frontier issue that has to be dealt with primarily at the grassroots level," said Mary Asaad, coordinator of the non-governmental FGM Combat Task Force.

Asaad's emphasis on the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in eliminating FGM reflects the general sentiment of unease manifested by women's rights and reproductive health activists. The lawsuit currently being disputed before an administrative court pits the minister of health, Ismail Sallam, against a group of individuals who seek to legalise FGM in all public and private hospitals alike. These include people like Sheikh Youssef El-Badri — notorious for his attempts to muzzle intellectuals and drastically restrict freedom of speech and expression through recourse to legal action — and gynaecologist Mounir Fawzi, who holds that the excision of a woman's clitoris limits the woman's sexual drive "to acceptable and reasonable levels".

Late last month, the administrative court received a report from a consultative legal committee suggesting that the ban should be lifted. According to the report, since the ritual itself is not actually illegal, the minister of health has no right to ban it. It further argued that the minister of health's executive prerogatives are confined to the state-run hospitals and clinics and that private clinics should not be subjected to such a decree.

"It does not look very promising," said Mohamed Abdel-Aal, a lawyer at the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR), who attended the hearing conducted by the Administrative Court on 20 May. "The report arguing for the right of the members of the medical profession to carry out this operation was very disappointing. And obviously it will influence the final decree."

The ruling is expected on 24 June.

El-Badri is almost confident that the final verdict will reverse the ministerial decree. From his point of view, FGM is necessary for every Muslim woman because it "checks women's sexual drive and thus protects them against any risk of sin [extramarital sex]".

Asaad, on the other hand, does not exclude "a setback", but remains "hopeful" that a court of law will consider the medical facts regarding the physical, psychological and social damage caused by FGM.

According to Abdel-Aal, if the verdict of the Administrative Court reverses the ministerial decree, Sallam and the NGOs siding with him could appeal to the Higher Administrative Court. The verdict of the Higher Administrative Court is irreversible.

Since the 1950s, a ministerial decree has banned FGM in public hospitals. In November 1994, however, the then minister of health, Ali Abdel-Fattah, lifted the ban. Abdel-Fattah's argument was that, since the practice is widespread anyway — over 90 per cent of Egyptian women are said to have undergone the operation — it is better that licensed doctors, as opposed to midwives, carry out the operation. The reversal of the ban was backed by the popular Sheikh Mohamed Metwali El-Shaarawi and the late Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Gad El-Haq Ali Gad El-Haq, both of whom spoke out strongly in favour of FGM, alleging that the practice was required by Islam.

The strongest opposing voice was that of the current Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, Mufti of the Republic at the time, who insists that the practice is not required, nor even condoned, by Islam.

Shortly before leaving office in 1995, Abdel-Fattah, who met with harsh criticism from local and international women's rights and reproductive health groups, issued a decree banning the practice in public hospitals. A few months after taking office in early 1996, Sallam issued his own decree. The lawsuit against the decree was initiated towards the end of the same year.

Some women's rights activists believe that, while grassroots awareness is the main war to win, it is still important that parliament issue a law making FGM illegal and punishable once and for all.

An anti-FGM law, they argue, would be a breakthrough in the battle against this unhealthy practice because it would underline the ethical and moral stance of the state against harmful rituals. "It would simply support the NGOs working on the ground," argued Aziza Hussein, a leading advocate in the war against the ritual. "If the state condones the practice, NGO workers who knock at the doors of villagers in rural areas would be told that the government allows the practice," she added.

Given the widespread belief that the pratice restrains a woman's sexual drive, however, some believe it is unlikely that a motion to ban FGM will receive the necessary stamp of approval from parliament. Some even argue that, even if a limited majority agrees to pass the law, it will be very difficult to compel the relevant organisations, not to mention the grassroots, to comply with it.

Last year the National Council for Motherhood and Childhood failed to include an article banning FGM in a draft law on child rights for fear that the whole law would be fudged over the FGM debate.

"We are aware that this is not going to be easy. But it is very important that we try and lobby supporters," said Maha Atiya, coordinator of the women's project in the EOHR. Like many activists, Atiya ascribes the difficulty of passing an anti-FGM law to the regressive environment and the way women are portrayed by many sources, particularly prominent religious personalities, as sex objects.

It was this regressive environment that quashed a motion made by former minister of family welfare, Maher Mahran, in 1994 to encourage parliament to put an end to what he described as the butchery to which female adolescents in Egypt are subjected.

Mahran's initiative was met with a ruling issued by the late Grand Imam of Al-Azhar that all Muslim women should be forced to undergo the practice.

Religious and national legislation, however, clash on many points relevant to FGM. The practice contravenes all the human rights charters signed by Egypt, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 24 of the convention stipulates that all signatory states should take necessary measures to eradicate conventional practices that are harmful to the health of the child.

Articles 241 and 242 of the Egyptian penal code also penalise any operation that deliberately inflicts a physical wound.

It is at these points of conflict and incompatibility that the greatest progress toward the eradication of FGM may be made. During the past few decades it has been NGOs that spearheaded the battle against FGM, whether by highlighting the illegal nature of the practice or by spreading anti-FGM awareness.

Grassroots community education and advocacy groups have taken the lead in ongoing efforts on this front. Although these groups are often small and staffed primarily by volunteers, they make up for these limitations by their commitment. They will need more than dedication, however. "The practice is very wide-spread. Much work is needed to eradicate it," said Asaad.

According to a recent survey carried out by Egypt's National Population Council eight out of ten women support the practice of FGM — better known as female circumcision — because they believe it to be "a good tradition".

The recent Demographic Health Survey indicated that 97 per cent of 14,779 women aged between 15 and 49 polled had undergone the operation either in their own homes at the hands of midwives using "a blade or a razor", or in hospitals with the help of licensed doctors. According to the results of the survey, the practice is not restricted to rural areas, but remains very common in cities.

Those who opposed the practice said that they were against FGM because it is painful.



A space of my own

I live on a narrow street in what, when I moved in twenty years ago, was considered a potential residential area. It was so potentially residential in fact, that there was not a single pharmacy in the entire neighbourhood and certainly no grocers, boutiques or workshops. There were a few anaemic trees under which a couple of cars of the four-cylinder variety were parked. Garbage was lackadaisically collected by small children on donkey carts. We also had an old *robabekia* (rag-and-bone) man, who regularly pushed his handcart up and down our street, doing a reasonable business in empty bottles and old newspapers. Sometimes a lost motorist ventured hesitantly into our neck of the desert.

Occasionally, the street would be blocked by a herd of goats, or country people would stop their horse-drawn carts and temporarily display their vegetables on the unpaved, dusty footpath. The milkman, containers clanging, came around early in the morning on his bicycle. Taxis refused to drive clients to the area at night, doctors were reluctant to make house calls and permanent dwellers lost several friends who felt unable to deal with this uncharted part of town.

On the bright side, there was plenty of parking space. Newly established foreign companies' top brass liked the quiet atmosphere and settled down with their families. It reminded them of the suburbs they had left behind. Their children walked to school and housewives rode to the shops on bicycles, with or without babies attached.

Times have changed. Not only does the suburb feature innumerable ugly new constructions, but its inhabitants are of a different type. Their children are now driven to school in limousines. Housewives no longer ride their bikes — they don't need to. There is a shopping complex on every corner. Pharmacies and workshops abound. My street has been transformed into a regular bazaar to which shoppers come in huge vans — the fashion this year, and the essential accessory, it seems, for any platform-shoe-wearer — more suitable for a full-fledged safari in the Western Desert than a trip to the local supermarket. The van owners have been on a head-on collision course with the developers for some time. The latter have built numerous blocks of apartments and sold them to owners of dozens of cars — of the eight-cylinder variety — now parked along the footpath, the basements of the new buildings being occupied, not by garages, but by state-of-the art commercial outfits which the van owners attempt to reach in their monstrous machines.

It has been proven statistically that drivers of very large cars are usually afflicted with delusions of grandeur. They tend to ply the roads recklessly and park negligently. They push their way into narrow passages and insist on others' compliance with their own interpretation of traffic etiquette. More often than not, the persons at the wheel are of a frail constitution, deriving their arrogance from the size of their vehicle. They think that they can block the street while they take time, not only to carefully choose their salad, but to have a spot of conversation with their next-door neighbours whom, apparently, they only meet at the shops. These peoples' teenage children usually drive their parents' deadly engines at night on the same narrow streets, running over stray cats and dogs with glee.

My street has been developed, therefore, and it is now complete with ugly apartment blocks, huge supermarkets and regular shoppers in private bulldozers.

These days I can no longer leave home and come back as I please. I have to observe traffic movements carefully to work out my schedule. Early morning is not a good time, because the greengrocer is receiving his vegetables. The truck, brimming with fresh produce, stops in the middle of the narrow street, already lined with private vehicles still wet and shining from their morning wash. The engine is kept running to provide us with a boost of carbon dioxide, while cabbage and lettuce are unloaded. On the heels — so to speak — of the vegetable truck comes the butcher's consignment, with young men in aprons dripping with blood, carrying huge carcasses on their backs across the street. Next come the various, brightly-hued commercial mini-vans whose drivers, not bothering with parking, hastily spill their ware onto the steps of the supermarket while school bus drivers impatiently — and continuously — honk their horns. Children run out of buildings, while mothers and maids, having kissed the little ones goodbye, stop in the middle of the road to observe the traffic jam.

Now is the time to make a dash for it, before the huge truck bearing hundreds of bottles of soft drink blocks the way completely, and just as the housewives, still gleaming from their aerobic classes, start arriving, perched on their tank-like carriers.

Coming back in the afternoon is no easier task: It is now the turn of husbands, back from work, to go for groceries, taking along the children and the family dog in the family car. Men live under the delusion that they are faster at shopping than their consorts. No need, then, to engage in a tedious three-point parking exercise, they won't be a minute. Abandoning vehicles, children and dog in the middle of the road, motor and air conditioning humming in ozone-layer-destroying harmony, they disappear and are less than happy upon their return, several minutes later, if someone points out their lack of consideration. I have met several such specimens who have had the cheek to express their dissatisfaction quite forcefully when asked if they intended to settle permanently on this particular spot.

I am one of those grouchy persons who eventually objects to her space being constantly invaded, her basic right to a parking space scorned. I don't like to see strangers' vehicles where mine ought to be, nor do I like it when they block my path to the entrance of the building I live in. I try to tell myself that this is nothing personal, just a reflection of the general loss of good manners. Why should I care? But I do, and, standing on my balcony, watching the daily gridlock, I dream of revenge. Flower pots, pails of dirty water, ink bottles of the old-fashioned variety can so easily fall out of windows. How pleasant a sound they make when they reach their target.

Fayza Hassan

The revenge of the Nile



photo: Sami Bushra

From left to right: Grand Sheikh Mohamed Tantawi, Ibrahim Nafie, Pope Shenouda III and Salaheddin Hafez

IN THE framework of the first training course for Arab environment journalists, a seminar entitled "Religion and the Protection of the Environment" was organised by Al-Ahram Regional Press Institute and the Arab Journalists' Federation. **Mahmoud Bakr** participated. At the end of the course, trainees received diplomas from Sayed Tantawi, Grand Sheikh of El-Azhar; Pope Shenouda III; Ibrahim Nafie, chairman of Al-Ahram and the Arab Journalists' Federation; and Salaheddin Hafez, *Al-Ahram* editor-in-chief and secretary-general of the Press Environmentalists.

Tantawi affirmed religious teachings exhort humanity to populate the world, but also to maintain the stability and harmony of the planet and to preserve purity of body and soul. Tantawi's address focused on the urgent need to protect the Nile from pollution, even if places of worship are at fault.

Pope Shenouda III remarked that protecting the environment against pollution is a religious duty, which may be fulfilled by planting trees and raising public awareness with respect to the environment.

Ibrahim Nafie noted that "our land has accommodated increasingly abusive exploitation of its environmental resources. High rates of population growth and the concomitant increase in industrial development rates, however, have had an impact in eroding the quality of the environment."

Nafie asserted that religious exhortations to preserve the environment may be traced to the papyri of Abidos. The lesson inscribed on the papyri, attributed to Osiris, warns the people against polluting the environment. The text reads: "Thou shalt not throw a stone into the bed of the sacred river so as not to contaminate its pure waters... The annual floods are an annual blessing. Beware of angering the god!"

This prophecy, some would argue, has been fulfilled. Pollution of the river has ultimately affected the health of human beings.

The majority of Arab states, Nafie noted, have enacted laws and designed mechanisms to protect their environment. Yet sporadic efforts will be useless without a campaign to raise awareness of environmental matters.

Sufra Dayma

Mushroom and beef stew

Ingredients:

1 1/2 kg fresh mushrooms
1/2 kg tender beef cutlets (preferably from the leg) (*moza*)
1 onion (finely chopped)
1 tsp. crushed garlic
1 tbsp. green coriander (finely chopped)
Butter ghee
Corn oil
Salt + pepper + allspice

Method:

Wipe the mushrooms clean with a piece of cloth or kitchen paper, then rinse them under running water and slice them. In a frying pan, stir-fry the mushrooms in corn oil, cover and leave for ten minutes over low heat. In a cooking pan, stir-fry the onion in butter ghee only until tender, then add the meat, stir, season and cover to release its residue over low heat. Add hot water if it dries up, and continue cooking. Half an hour before removing it from heat, add the mushrooms, stir them in and cover. In a frying pan, heat some corn oil, add the garlic and coriander and stir only until tender. Do not fry. Add them to the stew, stir, cover and remove from heat. Serve hot with rice, assorted vegetables and green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Sardine squash

Andrew Steele squeezes into Simmonds

It may be rather hackneyed, but one has to say it: *Simmonds* is really a bit of a Zamalek institution. Seldom is it empty, usually it's brimming. This morning was no exception. Quite by chance, I happened upon the counter area as someone was leaving and managed to stake my place.

For the uninitiated, perhaps it would be helpful at this juncture to run through the procedures one is well advised to follow if this most glittering of Zamalek coffee houses is one's venue of choice. First you pay your money then you take your choice. A till chitty must be presented to the pastry man or the maitre de café before their wares are proffered. A modicum of tip can help no end here, if the service you prefer is of the kind that comes with a smile. Quite right too. These coves provide a fine mirroring of that decidedly French coffee house service that is more than fitting with, well, to be frank, the phenomenon that is Simmonds.

The milieu does not scream "Cairo": the long marble counter, the display cabinets housing cakes and petits fours, the art deco fruit stands housing the raw materials for today's juices, the randomly dotted stools — both bar height and demi — the burbling cappuccino machine, the cosmopolitan clientele. A spit and sawdust *pastis* bar in Marseilles is more like what comes to mind, but, if you will, sans spit, sans sawdust and sans pastis.

One feels it probably hasn't changed much over the years. This surely is no bad thing. One knows where one is with Simmonds. It's something of a comfort. And so it was this morning as its air-conditioned portals welcomed me and my newspaper for a spot of light breakfast and some serious coffee.

The hot cabinet at the end of the bar houses, under a warming glow, Simmonds' selection of pies, patés and other savoury comestibles. I chose a mini pizza and a white cheese puff, both warm from what I have always regarded as the culinary equivalent of a tanning lamp. The pizza was passable — it even had a sardine on it — and the puff was moist and, predictably, puffy.

There is little to dislike about Simmonds' bakings. They are basic fare but worthy accompaniments to the simple but formidable beverages for which the establishment is justly celebrated. The best coffee in Cairo? I've heard it said and tend to accede. Brewed from that big old cappuccino machine with consummate flair. Small, black and mean is how I would describe the espresso that greeted me. Further from a Nescafé in terms of smell, taste and texture one could not get, this side of tea.

The seasonal fruit juices are also a delight. Orange and grapefruit were today's selections, available with or without sugar, with or without ice and juiced by hand before the customer's very eyes. Freshly squeezed in Simmonds means what it says.

"A real find" might be an appropriate description of one's first visit. This could equally well be repeated ad infinitum. And with breakfast for one — pastries, coffee and juice retailing at a measly LE6 — the value for money is nearly as good as the coffee.

Simmonds, 26 July Street, Zamalek

Al-Ahram Weekly

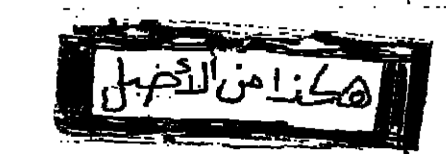
Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS
1. Reach across (4)
5. Twirled (4)
9. Refracting glass (5)
14. Gaelic language (4)
15. Relaxation (4)
16. Instrument panel of a motor vehicle (5)
17. French king (3)
18. Directory (5)
19. Redact (5)
20. Blue ribbons (6)
22. Amphora; bowl (3)
24. Actress Sandra ...(3)
25. Symbol for "chlorine" (2)
26. Miss McGraw (3)
27. A reddish-yellow colour, fine gravel (4)
29. Small south African antelope (6)
32. Segments (6)
36. Chinese for Way, basic principle of the cosmos (3)
38. Erudition; know-how (4)
40. Contort; protuberance (5)
41. Clerical linen vestment (3)
42. Moon's age at new year (5)
44. Viscous or sticky substance (3)
45. Sham attack to fool opponent (5)
48. Asian dress (4)
49. Telepathy for short (3)
50. Pavarotti et al (6)
52. Jabs (6)
55. Don (4)
57. Dark red wood of Hawaii, acacia (3)
58. Nazi special police force, abb. (2)
60. Decide; go for (3)
63. Impersonate (3)
64. Existence; real thing (6)
66. Brag about; plume oneself (5)
68. In the know (5)
71. Abbreviated appellation of a medical person (3)
72. Name of a card game for three (5)
73. Cherish (4)
74. Hollow out (4)
75. Spied, jumbled (5)
76. Drink of fermented honey and water (4)
77. Large deer, pl. (4)

DOWN
1. Pinnacle of ice on surface of a glacier (5)
2. Roam in search of prey (5)
3. A continent (4)
4. Symbol for "neon" (2)
5. Level-headed (8)
6. Fill up (3)
7. Hire (3)
8. A bond; connected network (5)
9. A German coin (7)
10. Pound in; collide with (3)
11. Frosted (4)
12. A mathematical function (4)
13. Manufactured (4)
18. Lethargic (4)
21. College cheer (3)
23. Whack; knock (3)
28. Recess; snuggery (3)
29. ...Hood (5)
30. Exp. of surprise and apology (4)
31. South African village (5)
33. Enclosures (5)
34. Cupid (4)
35. Garbage; swish around (4)
36. US President 1909-1913 (4)
37. On the sheltered side (4)
39. Light fawn (4)
43. Repaired in a clumsy way (8)
48. In these days (3)
49. Doctored (7)
51. Vitality; plant juice (3)
53. Departed (4)
54. Dine (3)
56. Dominion (5)
58. Bird pretended to bring babies (5)
59. Indian grooms (5)
60. Musical instrument (4)
61. Grandeur (4)
62. Labels (4)
65. Sacred cow e.g.; fetish (4)
67. ...Lanka (3)
69. Wretchedness (3)
70. Miss Gardener (3)
74. Auxiliary verb (2)

Last week's solution



Furniture doldrums in Damietta





The famed furniture industry of Damietta is not what it used to be. The industry that once helped finance the building of the High Dam finds it increasingly hard to compete, as **Jamaal-ud-deen Musallam** found out



photos: Sherif Sonbol

Secrets of seaworthiness

IT MAY not be the finest of shipyards, but Kafr Himidu, near Damietta, has an air of romantic dereliction that can evoke images of Noah's Ark. With the secrets of trade handed down from father to son, a handful of families control the shipyard, which could accommodate up to 30 ships at a time. A traditional wooden 20-metre fishing boat would cost about LE500,000 and take a few months to construct. A comparative metal-bottom boat would cost over LE1 million and take up to 18 months to build. The shipyard started building metal-frame boats less than a decade ago, according to Mohamed El-Badawi, a Damietta veteran sailor.

To state that the Damietta-based furniture industry is a bastion of the Egyptian economy would hardly have been exaggeration 30 years ago. Back in the time of state-run economy and partly-barter foreign trade, Egypt relied on its furniture exports to pay off some of its debts. Between 1968 and 1972, furniture exports to the Soviet Union settled approximately 60 per cent of the debt Egypt owed the then-superpower for its help in building the Aswan High Dam. The USSR remained Egypt's main importer of wooden furniture until the early seventies, when political differences culminated in Egypt expelling thousands of Soviet experts and changing ideological tack. The ensuing policies of economic liberalisation may have done much for the economy, but little for Damietta.

You cannot go anywhere in Damietta without encountering a furniture shop. The workers, sawing, sticking and hammering, are among the country's most esteemed craftsmen, but their future is not as bright as it once was.

Damietta exporters have been successfully looking out for new markets. "We export to the USA, the Gulf countries, and even to Italy," says Ahmed Wali, president of Damietta's Chamber of Commerce. But most exporters find the current level of exports, averaging $2 million a year, disheartening.

Mohamed Abu Samra and Ibrahim and Osama Abu Steit, all Damietta furniture shop owners, argue that the Egyptian furniture industry can do better. They claim that heavy taxation of the raw materials they need inflates export prices, blunting their competitive edge. And, it is not only the state they blame. They expect the Chamber of Commerce to act as a mediator between producers and customers and claim that the Chamber has failed to help them market their products.

Wali denies the charge: "The Chamber encourages the producers to participate in the Cairo International Fair (CIF) as well as overseas furniture exhibitions." The Chamber, he says, has arranged for a permanent pavilion to be alloted to furniture in the CIF. Wali notes that this will help promote direct contacts between sellers and buyers and, thereby, encourage trade. Wali also dismisses the idea that high taxation is undermining the industry. "The government encourages exports by exempting production inputs, such as timber, from import duties."

Among the other causes cited for Damietta's doldrums was competition from Cairo, where buyers are offered attractive terms of payment. Ali El-Far, a Damietta wood merchant, says that consumers opt for the 30-month instalment system adopted commonly in Cairo. Unfortunately, Damietta shops cannot adopt this system because of the difficulties involved in out-of-town debt collection.

Samir El-Khaneni, a Damietta furniture factory owner, cites another reason for the crisis. Skilful workers "have emigrated to other Arab countries. Syria, for example, now exports furniture made by Egyptians to Russia," he says. The phenomenon has led to a drop in the standards of an industry where craftsmanship is often the competitive edge.

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life

186 The history of exile as punishment in Egypt began during the reign of Mohamed Ali in the early 19th century. From that time and until the early 20th century, exile was not confined to political opponents of the government but extended to criminal offenders with bad records. After Britain occupied Egypt in 1882, the range of exile destinations went beyond the Ottoman Empire, of which Egypt had been part, to the vast British Empire. Readers of *Al-Ahram* engaged in a heated debate on exile in letters to the newspaper, with particular emphasis on Sudan as a favourite exile destination. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** treats the exile issue in this instalment of his *Diwan* chronicles

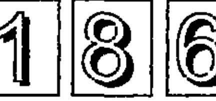


Illustration by: Makram Henein

Ahmed Shaker, Ibrahim Ragheb from Menouf, Boutros Basilius, Ahmed Fouad and Mohamed Ali Al-Sobki — these are the names of five *Al-Ahram* readers who, in the winter of 1908, reopened a much neglected chapter in Egyptian history.

To *Al-Ahram* readers today, exile evokes only what this country experienced in the course of the latter half of this century in the Nasserist period — the voluntary departure from Egypt of the victims of the revolutionary experience. For the most part, these voluntary emigrants chose to settle in Europe and were either politicians from the old era who refused to accept the new order or capitalists whose interests suffered as a result of the economic measures decreed by the revolution. The fierce clash between the revolutionary command and the Muslim Brotherhood also prompted many Muslim Brothers to choose voluntary exile in order to avert the possibility of police harassment. Most of these individuals opted for Saudi Arabia as the place to wait out their period of voluntary exile.

Today's readers will also recall that voluntary exile continued under President Sadat. The majority of exiles in this era, however, were prominent Egyptian intellectuals who had come into repeated conflict with the regime. Most of these settled in Europe; particularly France, where a large number of Egyptian intellectuals congregated.

Readers will note, however, that this phenomenon has virtually vanished under the presidency of Hosni Mubarak. This marked decline is largely attributable to the broader margin of freedom of expression that characterises this era and to the considerably greater freedom from harassment by the security services that the opposition has come to enjoy in comparison with the two preceding eras. Now voluntary exile is restricted to those groups that have opted for violence as a means to attain their political goals.

Matters were entirely different for *Al-Ahram* readers at the opening of this century. Exile had a lengthy history that had begun with the founding of the centralised state under Mohamed Ali. At that time, exile was not restricted to political opponents, but extended to habitual criminal offenders. In addition, the notion of exile itself was subject to a range of different conceptual considerations, including distance from Cairo. Modern readers might be startled to learn that, in 1809, in the wake of Mohamed Ali's dispute with the popular leadership, Mohamed Ali had Omar Makram banished to Damietta. But then travel from Cairo to this Mediterranean port city at the time took many days. As for criminals, they were most often banished to Tokar in Sudan.

One measure of the notion of distance at that time is provided by an *Al-Ahram* correspondent who offered his readers a detailed chronicle of his journey to Sudan in 1882. It is sufficient to learn that the trip from Aswan to Khartoum alone, excluding the trip from Cairo to Aswan, took 27 days. The duration of the trip was not the only problem. Frequently travel was fraught with peril.

It is interesting to note that following the British occupation of Egypt, authorities in Cairo had before them a broader choice of places of exile. Sudan, of course, remained a preferred location for the banishment of criminals, at least until Khartoum fell to the Mahdis in 1885 and Greater Syria and other parts of the Ottoman empire remained a preferred place of exile for political undesirables. However, added to these were some of the territories that belonged to the "empire upon which the sun never set." Among these was Sri Lanka, then Ceylon, which is where several leaders of the Orabi revolution were exiled. The choice of places of exile altered during World War I, after Great Britain declared Egypt a British protectorate. Ottoman territories were no longer an option, but then many other British territories, particularly its islands in the Mediterranean, served as substitutes. Malta was a favoured location as the exile of Egypt's revolutionary leader Saad Zaghlul to that island in *1919 demonstrates.*

The presence of large foreign communities in Egypt accounted for another type of exile: the banishment of foreign expatriates. Generally, foreigners found guilty of offenses were "banished" to their countries of origin. However, the process was much more complex than exiling native Egyptian or Ottoman subjects, since many foreigners enjoyed the protection of their foreign consulates in accordance with the capitulation system. The first order of business in bringing foreign offenders to justice was to determine which was the competent court to prosecute them. Although most were immune to prosecution in the national courts, it still had to be determined whether they would be prosecuted in the mixed courts or in the consular courts.

Of course, in cases where criminal conduct was clear-cut, the foreign consulates frequently complied with the request of the Egyptian authorities to exile the foreign subjects. But then views differed as to whether to term the punishment inflicted "exile" as the expatriates so sentenced could not technically be considered Egyptians even if they had been long established in the country. Another problem was that frequently exiled foreigners attempted to sneak back into the country. Most of these exiles, according to *Al-Ahram*, were "pub denizens, gambling addicts, market ruffians, and associates of evil and corruption." Thus, their banishment was largely for reasons of preserving the public peace and safety rather than for political considerations. Yet, as most of these were of lower class origins in their native countries and lived on the margins of their societies, it was only natural that they would be unhappy in their own countries or that their own countries would grow discontented with them. In all events, they certainly would not have enjoyed the advantages accorded to them by the capitulation system in Egypt where they also found the shelter and support of their compatriots and members of their own class. Most of these were concentrated in the Italian and Greek communities. So frequent were attempts on the part of exiled foreigners to sneak back into Egypt that a special secret police had to be created in order to apprehend exiles who managed to infiltrate across the borders and to expel them once more.

Although there would be waves of exiles during times of political crisis, the majority of exiles involved security concerns. One dramatic turn of events to precipitate a flurry of exiles occurred when Ismail succeeded in altering the law of succession to the throne of the Khedive for the benefit of his branch of the ruling family. As a result of dissension within the family and the intrigue which extended to the highest political circles in Istanbul, Ismail had most of the members of the dissenting branch of the family banished to Istanbul. Another security concern for the Khedive was the influx of political dissidents from other quarters of the Arab world. Fearing that these elements would stir discontent and perhaps foment rebellion, the Khedive had them banished. The exile of Gamal Al-Afghani is a case in point. Although Ismail had welcomed the arrival of this prominent philosopher and religious personality, he soon came to be disturbed by Al-Afghani's bitter criticisms of his policies. Al-Afghani had also rallied around himself a considerable following among Egyptian intellectuals.

Sudan as a place of exile emerged as a topic of controversy among the readers of *Al-Ahram* in the winter of 1906-7. The first to raise the issue was *Al-Ahram* reader Ahmed Shaker whose letter appeared in the newspaper's 21 November 1906 edition under the title "Does the Government have a Beneficial Project?" In his letter Shaker complains of the rising crime rates and the shortage of prisons. The poor, he writes, "have run out of all resources and have consequently turned to thievery, robbery, pillage and murder while the government in spite of all the prohibitive laws and vigilant surveillance, has been unable to secure the public's safety and establish peace and security in the provinces." Shaker's assessment is corroborated by Ahmed Shafiq, the palace confidant, who writes in his memoirs that the Khedive had consulted with the British High Commissioner on this matter. Shafiq recounted that the Khedive expressed his concern that people refuse to travel to the countryside where they fear that their life is in jeopardy.

Boutros Basilius was another *Al-Ahram* reader who voiced his grievances against rising crime. Those criminals, he complained, "spend their days in the dens of drink and dissolution, in the bars and houses of debauchery, and at night they rob and steal." According to Basilius, prisons were not only in short supply, they offered a comfortable punishment for the perpetrators of crime. If they can not get their fill of glittering gold, he writes, "they would prefer to lie back in prison where they are readily provided with food and drink. To these people prison is a splendid and luxurious palace, for there is a vast difference between these establishments and the wretched hovels to which they are accustomed. Prison is no deterrent to them."

Exile to Sudan as an alternative to prison, however, provoked considerable controversy among those *Al-Ahram* readers who participated in this debate. One reader who favoured the idea in general wrote, "Once the government apprehends these *indigents it should* send them to Sudan where they would be given land to live upon and develop, thereby offering them in their alienation from their country the opportunity to earn an honest livelihood and to free themselves of their moral turpitude."

A second advocate of exile to Sudan contributed his conception of how benefit might be derived from the banished convicts. The government could allocate a special location where they would be put to work in reclaiming and cultivating the land, he suggests. "The government would put them under guard in order to prevent them from returning to this country. The guards' salaries could be paid from the income generated by the land cultivated by those exiles and the government could undertake the reaping and sale of the harvests so as to collect the necessary revenues to sustain the convicts and support the guards."

Mohamed Ali Al-Sobki opposed the notion of exile to Sudan from the outset. Firstly, he argues, the harm caused by the wretched lawbreakers in Egypt is not to be compared to "the evils perpetrated by the these people in those countries of vast expanses of territory such as central Africa, China and the lands of the Arabs where they commit every heinous crime from robbery to plunder and murder and then flee to the mountains where the government has no chance of finding them." Were criminals to be banished to Sudan, he continues, they would be at liberty to act precisely as their counterparts in the larger countries for Sudan has numerous places where they could seek refuge. "It would be as though the government banished them in order to guide them to the escape route. It is impossible establish the necessary security forces to keep all the convicts confined to a single village as one writer claims."

On a more humane note, this *Al-Ahram* reader added that to banish these criminals "will deprive their children forever of someone to oversee their upbringing."

In subsequent *Al-Ahram* issues, the advocates of exile responded to the arguments against it.

Ahmed Shaker mocked Al-Sobki's naiveté. "The convicts will be sent to an expansive, sparsely populated country. How will they be able to flee when they find themselves in a country where there are extensive deserts, high, rocky mountains, perilous cliffs, numerous rivers, inhabitants whose tongues are unintelligible to them, few and distant means of transport, heavy rains and scorching heat. Where would they run to?"

In the end, *Al-Ahram* intervened in support of the advocates of exile in Sudan. "In this country there are people who have no craft or industry but thievery and robbery. If they are put into prison they will eventually come out, even *more determined in their criminal ways.* Exile to Sudan, however, severs these criminals from the body of the nation, sparing the people their evil while benefiting from their work in exile." The major difficulty, according to *Al-Ahram*, was "to designate that area in exile in which the convicts can be put to work under strict surveillance. If the Egyptian government possessed an island or a stretch of land from which it would be impossible to flee, the Ministry of Justice would immediately pass a law conferring upon the courts the right to sentence criminals to exile."

Participants in the debate had only to await the government's action in the matter. Nearly a year after the idea was first mooted, the government passed the law of "administrative exile." However, the wording of the law came as a disappointment to those who had participated in the debate. While on the surface it appeared intended to combat the rising rates of crime, they feared that in fact it was engineered to counter the nationalist movement. The rising tide of nationalism, however, is the subject of later editions of *Al-Ahram*.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



Special supplement on Sweden to celebrate its National Day



Egyptian-Swedish relations grow and flourish

US$175 million in Egyptian exports to Sweden in 1996... an Egyptian-Swedish economic and technical cooperative committee

Speech by Samih Darar, Egyptian ambassador to Sweden

Cultivating the relations between nations has always been, and still is, the aspiration of humans and nations seeking peace in all aspects of life, be it economics, culture, social or political.

Egypt, the land of the earliest civilisation, laid the first cornerstone in constructing human peace. Egypt shares the hope of maintaining peace with many countries. In my opinion, Egypt shares this aim together with many other aspects of Sweden. It is only every ambassador's hope in Sweden to keep and sustain the mutual interests and common views shared by the two countries, and also to expand and make good use of them. Thus, I ask God to help me serve my country in the best way and use my potential at my hands to strengthen relations with Sweden.

Relations between Egypt and Sweden go back in history to 1890 when Queen Victoria visited Egypt at the age of 29 at her doctor's recommendation, who suggested Egypt's mild climate. The queen's health vastly improved and as a result of her love for Egypt and her frequent visits, she created paintings of the Egyptian countryside and the Nile. She also participated in some excavations, taking home with her a mummy that was placed in a room bearing her name at Obsala University. She also wrote a book about Egypt, *Vom Nile*, and had contact with the khedivial family when she resided in Mena House or on one of the royal Nile cruisers.

Today, Egypt and Sweden are joined together with economic ties in the form of a cooperative committee in economics, trade and industry. This committee holds its meetings in one of the two countries, and its businessmen have a cooperative council that held its latest meeting in 1994.

Furthermore, there has been an organisation of Egyptian and Swedish businessmen, consisting of 18 members, that has been formed recently. Its first *meeting will be held later this month.*

Samih Darar Egyptian ambassador to Sweden

Technical cooperation between the two countries has benefited greatly, especially in the field of energy, which received 60 per *cent of the cooperative projects. The Swedish aid organisation* CIDA has also contributed in several projects in various fields providing the equivalent of SEK149 million as of the end of 1996.

On the cultural level, the most important event is the Swedish project to turn its church located in Alexandria into a cultural centre that would have distinguished activities in Egypt. The interest in religious dialogue has been increasing recently in Sweden, to the extent that a conference entitled Europe and Islam was held in Stockholm in 1995. A second conference of that nature was held in Jordan in 1996, with the aim of having a dialogue between Islam and the West.

On the political side, Sweden has always been clear about its non-allied policy. Its security policy is based on not engaging in military or armed alliances, keeping away from conflict. This is clearly reflected in its relations with ivarious countries. Sweden is keen on having an active role in the United Nations, after being made a member of the UN Security Council, where it will work to resolve international problems based on the establishment of international peace and security.

It should be mentioned that the Egyptian-Swedish Friendship Association is trying to revive itself by reestablishing contacts between prominent Egyptian and Swedish intellectuals. The association is trying to pursue the aim it was founded for in 1986, supporting cultural, social and artistic relations. It is hoped that through the Egyptian-Swedish Businessman's Association *such a unique association can be* revived.

Fruitful cooperation and continued progress in relations between Egypt and Sweden

His Majesty King Carl Gustav of Sweden and his wife Queen Silvia

Since Sweden joined the European Union in 1995, its trade and economic relations have *grown rapidly.*

In terms of their trade relations, the amount of Egyptian exports to Sweden in 1994 reached US$52.3 million *that increased in 1995 to $110 million* and $175 million in 1996.

The industrial and metal exports are the most important in Egyptian non-*traditional exports to Sweden,* followed by foodstuffs and chemicals. During 1995 and 1996, the efforts of the Egyptian Commercial Repre*sentation Office bore fruit as they suc*ceeded in concluding several deals of ready-made clothing, some industrial products, and they have managed to *sell* a great amount of Egyptian oranges, potatoes and onions over the last few years.

Ahmed El-Guwelli Head of the Egyptian Commercial Representation Office in Sweden

Swedish exports to Egypt have similarly been successful; Swedish exports to Egypt increased from $261 million in 1995 to $270 million in 1996. The most important Swedish exports to Egypt was timber and engineering products like paper and wood pulp. This reflects how the Egyptian market benefits from such fundamental products that are of great importance in this crucial phase of economic development in Egypt.

Out of all the Scandinavian countries, the Swedish market is considered the most promising as it can take more Egyptian exports, especially ready-made clothing which are now duty-free after Sweden joined the European Union. There are also other Egyptian exports that can be doubled, like textiles, carpets, agricultural products, foodstuffs comprising all kinds of fruit and vegetables — canned, fresh and frozen — rice, confectioneries, juice and flowers. *All these products are of great im*portance to the Swedish market.

Another aspect of relations between the two countries is the Egyptian-Swedish Committee *for Economic and Technical Cooperation,* which alternately convenes in each of the two countries. So far the committee has convened six times, the most recent taking place in Stockholm in 1994. For businessmen, the Egyptian-Swedish Businessmen's Council was formed and has already convened three times. Sweden has also provided Egypt with small-interest loans to SEK685 to finance projects in electricity, communication and industry.

The technical cooperation between the two countries extends back to 1977. It aims at the exchange of knowledge and technology through fi*nancing technical studies of projects.* An estimated number of SEK122 million was spent on technical studies of about 95 different projects.

The Swedish *aid* organisation CIDA has been helping through its training courses, to enhance the technical efficiency of Egyptian management. By the end of 1996, CIDA managed to train 445 Egyptians at a total cost of SEK27.5 million in various fields ranging from industry, power, management, environmental protection, agriculture and health.

Moreover, Sweden donated SEK10 million to the Egyptian Social Fund for Development, plus SEK8 million in the form of humanitarian aid through the International Red Cross.

In terms of investment, the Swedish Fund for Industrial Cooperation with Developing Countries already has shares worth SEK5 million in the capital of 3 Egyptian-Swedish companies, as well as other shares of about LE28 million in the capital of some cooperative projects.

Egyptian-Swedish cooperative investment was crowned in 1996 with the establishment of the Egyptian-Swedish Company for Pharmaceutical Materials. The *plant for this com*pany will occupy 37 feddans in the governorate of Qena at a cost of $170 million, in cooperation with the National Bank of Egypt, *and the Swedish company Hebi, headed by* Refaat El-Sayed.

A message from Christer Sylvén, ambassador of Sweden to Egypt, on the occasion of Swedish National Day

Stockholm: Mohamed Seif El-Yazal

I wish to thank *Al-Ahram* for giving me this opportunity to address its readers on the occasion of Swedish National Day.

The Arab Republic of Egypt and Sweden are situated rather far from each other geographically and our two peoples have different experiences and traditions. In spite of that there have been lively contacts over the years between our two countries. Egypt and Sweden have deep and excellent long-standing bilateral relations with each other. We have a close cooperation in the United Nations, and in other international fora and over the years we have had long-standing and close cooperation also in the cultural field.

Sweden and Egypt have also long-standing trade relations. Swedish exports to Egypt in 1996, according to Swedish statistics, amounted to 1823 million Swedish crowns (approximately LE818 million). Egyptian exports to Sweden are growing fast. According to our statistics they went up from SEK775 to SEK1179 million, an increase in current prices of some 52 per cent.

I am optimistic about the future development of the trade relations between Egypt and Sweden. The potential of our bilateral trade is quite promising. Construction, transportation, telecommunication, chemical products, packaging technology, energy conservation and environmental protection, etc, constitute vital areas for business cooperation. Industrial automation is another area where Swedish *industry developed a high degree of sophistica*tion.

Swedish bilateral development assistance to Egypt has mainly taken the form of technical assistance, various feasibility studies and, above all, training. Sweden also participated with a contribution of SEK60 million to the establishment of the Social Fund for Development. The activities in the field of training have often been tailor-made to suit the needs of various organisations and authorities. Furthermore, Egyptians have also been given scholarships and grants in order to participate in international training courses arranged in Sweden.

During the past year, there has been an important exchange of visits between Egypt and Sweden. The Queen of Sweden, Queen Silvia, visited Cairo *in September 1996. The Swedish* Parliamentary Ombudsman visited Cairo in December 1996 upon invitation from the Egyptian social prosecutor and the Speaker of the Parliament Dr Fathi Sorour visited Stockholm in July 1996. At the beginning of this year the secretary of state of the Swedish Ministry of Defence was invited to Cairo. The Swedish government is now looking forward to the visit in Stockholm by the minster of electricity and energy, Engineer Maher Abaza, who will come to Sweden in June 1997.

Christer Sylvén Ambassador of Sweden

To conclude, I would like to take this opportunity to convey to the people of the Arab Republic of Egypt through *Al-Ahram* my best wishes and at the same time my thanks to all those who contributed to a closer friendship, better understanding and extended cooperation between Egypt and Sweden.

West Swedish Chamber of Commerce fostering Egyptian-Swedish ties

Last year in October, Mr Bjoern Hedberg, manager for the Western Swedish Chamber of Commerce, visited Egypt together with Mr Essam El-Naggar, who has his own business consulting company in Sweden. They visited a number of business organisations including the local chambers of commerce in both Cairo and Alexandria where they met Mr Mahmoud El-Arabi and Mr Mustafa El-Naggar, both chairman of the respective chambers. *Of course, they also visited the* Swedish Embassy *in Cairo* and the consulate in Alexandria.

Bjoern Hedberg

The response from the Egyptian market was *beyond all expectations and the Swedish* delegation brought several new business contracts back home, some of them have already generated new business, especially within wood and agricultural projects.

Essam El-Naggar

Most probably, a joint agreement will be signed between the Chamber of Commerce in Egypt and the Western Swedish Chamber of Commerce, which hopefully will *generate substantially more business among the two* countries.

A few words from Calle Nyquist, Swedish economic expert

The impressions I got at my recent visit to Sharm El-Sheikh with *SF Marina System was that* people in this part of Egypt are very conscious about the environment, and are very committed to the cultural heritage they have on the Sinai peninsula.

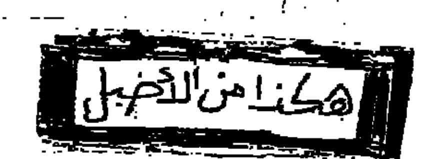
Calle Nyquist

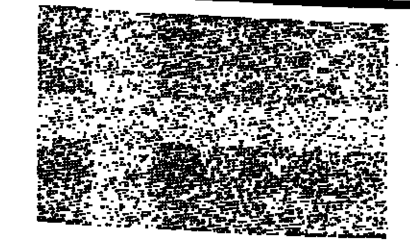
Territories such as Ras Mohamed are totally protected from all exploitation, furthermore those in Sharm have engaged a former marine captain to be responsible for the diving excursions which are done to inspect the marine environment, which is so very unique, to see that it is not disturbed and that divers do not interfere in the normal behaviour of the sealife.

I also had the opportunity to meet the governor of Sinai. He was very anxious about "his" peninsula, but realises the importance of having to handle tourism by assigning land to establish marinas.

I also got the impression that our host, Mr Mohamed Nessim, who is certainly very proud of this beautiful part of the world, is well aware of the environmental problems which can arise in connection with tourism and consequently, he makes sure that the expansion in this region continues in a rapid but controllable way.

Finally, I would like to thank Arab Sweden International AB for *all their help in making it possible* to visit *this beautiful country.*





Special supplement on Sweden to celebrate its National Day

The key to Egyptian-Swedish relations

How Qadri El-Naggar convinced Sweden to invest in Egypt

Hoda El-Shafei

Eng. Qadri El-Naggar receiving Ambassador Samih Darar in Malmö

The visit of former Ambassador Hamdi Nada with Eng. Qadri El-Naggar, manager of Arab Sweden International AB, made Swedish newspaper headlines as El-Naggar discussed his activities in promoting relations between Egypt and Sweden. Likewise, most Swedish papers, especially those in the providence of Malmö, reported on investment opportunities in Egypt.

It was also through the visit of Mohamed Nessim, chairman of the board of SF Marina Egypt, with El-Naggar that swayed public opinion towards the idea of investing in Egypt.

Another factor in establishing closer ties between the two countries was the visit of the new ambassador to Sweden, Samih Darar, with El-Naggar.

El-Naggar's desire to invest in Egypt saw the light when he opened the largest marina construction company in Egypt. Doing so caused Swedes to take notice of the investment potentiality that Egypt has. "The developments taking place in Egypt have truly surprised everyone," El-Naggar said. "We have discussed matters with the new cabinet, under the leadership of Dr Kamal El-Ganzouri, who said that he has taken a personal interest in seeing that bureaucratic obstacles will be removed to pave the way for further Swedish investment in Egypt."

As for the new company, SF Marina Egypt, its activities are run by 3 parties: El-Naggar, Sinai Hotel Co, headed by Mohamed Nessim, and the Swedish SF Marina International Co, one of the largest companies operating in the field of marina and port construction in accordance to international environmental regulations. "It is unfortunate that until now in Egypt, some businessmen consider the environment as a purely external factor," El-Naggar explained. "The reality is quite the opposite, though. For example, there are wavebreakers that are built in such a way that they prevent sand from reaching the beaches. After a few months, the beaches become literally clogged with sand, and as a result are ruined. But with Swedish know-how and Egyptian labour, environmentally-sound ports and wavebreakers can be built with the same high standard of Swedish quality at a lesser cost."

When it was first announced that such a company would be established here in Egypt, interest was generated all across the country. The commissioner of Alexandria is interested in constructing one of the largest international yachting marinas in Alexandria, something that would indeed open new and unprecedented vistas for tourism in Egypt. The governor of South Sinai has also expressed his interest in a new project to construct harbours and marinas throughout South Sinai.

Yet behind every successful man is a woman, and in the case of Eng. Qadri El-Naggar it is his wife, Hoda El-Shafei.

SF Fritid exporting timber and computer equipment



Gen. Alaa Mabrouk Yehia Misbah Dr. Hasan Mustafa

Yehia Misbah, famed businessman in Sweden, is among those having great expertise in the field of exporting Swedish timber. He has resided in Sweden since 1971. He was also a sportsman for Ahli Club, representing Egypt in table-tennis, and worked as coach for the Libyan national team from 1968-1971

Yehia Misbah: "Egyptian sporting federations should follow the example of the Handball Federation headed by Dr Hassan Mustafa"

Stockholm: Mohamed Seif El-Yazal

In a question about the recent activities of the company, Misbah answered that SF Fritid has begun exporting computers and photocopying machines, both new and used.

Yehia Misbah is an active man, both in society and sports. He is a big supporter of handball, and an honourary member of the Egyptian Handball Federation, and gives his continuous support when the Egyptian team plays outside of Egypt.

When I asked him about his opinion of Egyptian sports and football in particular, he answered: "I would like to always see the Egyptian teams in the lead, especially in African and the rest of the world. I had a conversation with Ibrahim Hegazi about football and aspects of restructuring the sport in Egypt. I support Hegazi completely, because what he says is in the best interest of Egyptian sports and football. It is my personal opinion that the various federations should follow the activities of the Egyptian Handball Federation, which, under the leadership of Hassan Mustafa, has made the rapid advancement which we have recently seen at the international level."

When I asked him about the founding of SF Fritid, he paused to mention the company's founder, the late Alaa Mabrouk.

In a question posed to him about investing in Egypt, Misbah answered: "In societies such as Scandinavia, there is a large amount of Egyptian businessmen who are clearly interested in investing in their mother country, especially in light of the secure climate as well as the new laws and facilities issued to encourage investment in Egypt. Even now, Egyptian businessmen have begun actively investing in Egypt, especially Upper Egypt." He added that "although we have been absent for over 30 years, one day we will return to Egypt's Nile and sun."

Misbah said that the Egyptian ambassador to Sweden and Commercial Consul Ahmed El-Guweili have inaugurated the largest exhibition of ready-made clothing. Attending the opening was the mayor of Strömstad, the chief of police, and thousands of businessmen and consumers who were clearly impressed by the products on display and the organisation of the exhibition itself.

Egyptian excellence in Sweden

Dr Mustafa Tag El-Din

Dr Mustafa Tag El-Din is a major consultant in civil defence in Sweden. He graduated from the Faculty of Engineering, Cairo University, 1970.

Dr Tag El-Din is considered a pioneer in the art of disaster management, and has contributed a number of important studies known all over the world. He now works as head of a consultancy firm, Demco, for disaster management and civil defence, in addition to his work at the Swedish National Rescue Authority. He is also chief technical adviser to the United Nations.

From 1975 to 1980 he applied his knowledge in Tunisia when he was commissioned by the Swedish government to manage their projects in Tunisia.

In 1984 the UN Higher Council for Refugees called him to head the technical unit responsible for the return of Somali refugees.

Dr Tag El-Din has provided his expertise to more than 25 African, Arab and Asian countries, including America, Canada and Europe. A number of Arab nations have appointed him in his capacity as consultant to the UN, such as the Egyptian, Saudi and UAE civil defence. As for his relationship with his native country Egypt, his activities have been numerous. Minister Atef Obeid appointed him as consultant in planning environmental disaster relief, while the Foreign Ministry appointed him as consultant to mediate with European associations in applying a system of disaster relief and limiting their effects.

Dr Tag El-Din is also the author of more than 100 publications on disaster relief management, refugees management and émigré return.

SF Marina: One of the largest port construction companies

Mr Lars Owui

SF Marina is one of the largest companies to build ports, constructing them in every corner of the globe, from Japan in the east, the United States in the west, Scandinavia in the north, to New Zealand in the south.

The company has been authorised to work in Spain, Greece, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United States, Mexico, Singapore, and Japan. The company has representative offices in 20 countries in all parts of the world, including Egypt, where it is constructing hotels and diving centres in Sinai, and has cooperated in constructing a port in Naama Bay at Sharm El-Sheikh.

In September 1996, SF Marina signed an agreement to expand its activities in the Sinai, which is but a part of the ongoing development that is taking place in this region. The tourism in Sinai has witnessed such a flourishing development, that it is now at the level of tourist resorts found in Europe. With that, the company has decided to enter into cooperative projects with hotel and diving companies in Sinai, marketing their products while searching for new opportunities to implement projects, such as wavebreakers and yachting ports.



Successful Egyptians in Sweden



May Samih Darar



Radwa Ahmed El-Guweili

May Samih Darar is in her first year at the French Lyceé secondary school in Stockholm. She excels in French and English and she began studying Spanish in 1994 at the Lyceé in Cairo.

Radwa Ahmed El-Guweili is a student at the German School in Stockholm. Her German language teacher is proud to say that Radwa speaks German like a native.



Dr Atef Obeid, in between Mohamed Hussein, chairman of the board of Misr Travel, and Tom Schlinder, head of the Swedish company

Cooperative Protocol between Misr Travel and a Scandinavian company

Misr Travel held a welcoming reception to commemorate the signing of a cooperative protocol with a Swedish tourism company. Signing the protocol from Misr Travel was Mohamed Ahmed Hussein, chairman of the board, and from the Swedish side, Mr Tom Schlinder, head of the Swedish company. Atef Obeid, minister of the public enterprise sector was also in attendance.

Nazami Yousef, public relations and marketing manager for Misr Travel, said: "The cooperative protocol will last for 5 years starting from October 1997, whereby we can expect an increase in the number of Scandinavian tourists to reach 25 thousand for the 1997/1998 season."

A meeting between Mohamed Nessim, Eng. Qadri El-Naggar and owners of Swedish tourism companies

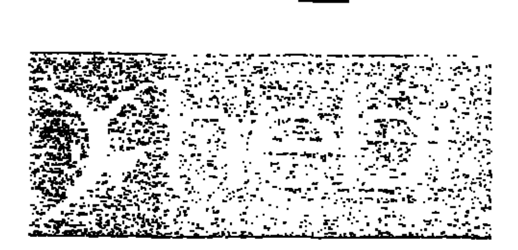


Mohamed Nessim said "I did not discover the Swedish and Scandinavian market in general until after a recent visit there, especially after the Gothenburg International Tourism Exhibition which had stressed the importance of this large market. My encounters with owners of Swedish tourism companies, thanks to the efforts of Qadri El-Naggar, were favourable, especially after an article appeared in one of the largest newspapers in Sweden, speaking of Sinai as a future paradise for Swedish tourists. The meeting between myself and the Swedish Tourism Authority came about from the efforts of Mr Mohamed El-Lahita and EgyptAir in Copenhagen, Misr Travel in Stockholm, Qadri El-Naggar, and the Egyptian Embassy in Stockholm, in addition to a group of Swedish journalists and tour companies. Through this meeting we were able to open this major market.





Project begun to manufacture pharmaceutical materials



Project to be built on an area of 37 feddans in the industrial zone of Qena

Project embodies Egyptian-Swedish cooperation in manufacturing pharmaceutical materials

It is known that soaring prices of basic chemicals can be attributed to the technical know-how invested in this industry as well as the costs of advanced equipment used to develop these products. After careful study, Hebi Health Care decided to establish one of the largest chemical factories in Egypt.

Aims of the project:

— To construct an industrial base that will develop the materials required for operating pharmaceutical factories.

— Producing a fair share of products for export. Hebi Care has many agents worldwide, including Sweden.

— Having a research centre operating at international standards in Egypt. This will help guarantee the protection of patent rights.

Osama Abbas, one of the representatives of the company in Egypt, stated that the latter goal was the reason for the speedy cooperation on the part of all government officials to give approval to the project.

Selwa Eid, one of the company's consultants in Egypt, added that preliminary discussions and consultations with Ismail Sallam, Egyptian health minister, and Gamila Moussa, under-secretary to the minister, highlighted that the project is of necessity to the local market, which will benefit from the company's products.

It is expected that local components used in the manufacturing of pharmaceuticals will increase to 50 per cent.

As part of its strategy, Hebi Health Care Group acquired the ownership of some companies already operating, and is venturing into joint investments.

The basic principle remains, however, to acquire patent rights of newly-introduced projects.

Hebi Health Care specialises in the area of producing viscose fibres. The company owns the Nyesfinska factory, an acquisition which gave Hebi Health Care 15 per cent total viscose fibre production in Europe in 1994. 85-95 per cent of its products are directed towards Western Europe.

Hebi Health Care also chose to specialise in the area of producing herbal medicines. The largest herbal medicine factory in Sweden is Novasan which serves as a production plant for its other clients and is entirely owned by Hebi Health Care.

Hebi Health Care also owns the Swedelife Co. which operates in the same field.

The company's products are in high demand from health care institutions, hospitals and pharmacies. The company selected Hossam Omar to be the agent of Swedlife Co. in Egypt and the Middle East. Four items produced by Swedlife are being marketed in Egypt:

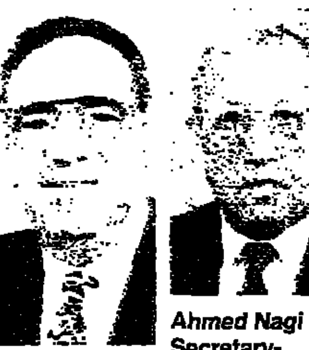
— Swed Active Man: This gives men over 30 years of age extra energy, and enhances their immune systems.

— The Swed Active Woman: For women over 30 years of age, this product adds vitality to the overall performance of their bodies.

— Swed Mint: To alleviate flu symptoms.

— Swed Climatic: A preparation designed to relieve fatigue and produce energy.

All products in the Swedlife line are distinguished by their quality, using natural herbs that are carefully prepared and safe to use.



Safwat Shakir Governor of Qena

Ahmed Nagi Secretary-General of Qena Governorate

Safwat Shakir, governor of Qena, welcomed the Swedish Association headed by Rafaat El-Sayed, along with Ahmed El-Guweili, head of the Commercial Representation Office in Stockholm. The land for the project was given to the association in a small ceremony attended by Gen. Ahmed Nagi, secretary-general of the governorate, who explained the numerous possibilities and facilities offered by Qena Governorate to investors.

Refaat El-Sayed, head of the Swedish association managing the project:

"Environmental development will be done in cooperation with Qena University, with university students trained to run the factory.

"Research and development is to be carried out with the aim of gaining patent rights for pharmaceutical materials.

"This project will fulfil 80 per cent of the Egyptian pharmaceutical industry's needs."

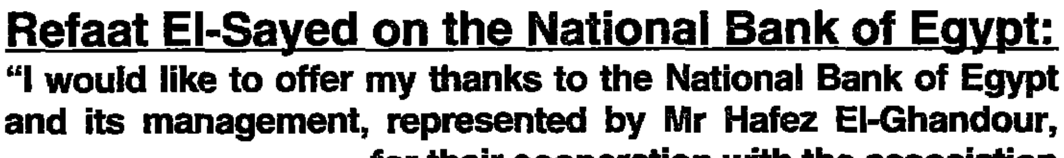


Refaat El-Sayed
Egyptian businessman and head of the Swedish Association



Safwat Shakir, governor of Qena, in front of Refaat El-Sayed, during a special meeting to present the land to the company. Also pictured are Commissioner Ahmed El-Guweili, Dr Salah Shahata and Attorney Magdeddin Zaher

Refaat El-Sayed on the National Bank of Egypt:



"I would like to offer my thanks to the National Bank of Egypt and its management, represented by Mr Hafez El-Ghandour, for their cooperation with the association in helping this project to succeed."

Dr Hossam Omar Head of United Pharmeceutical Company Agent for Swedlife in the Arab world

Dr Mohsen Shalabi Distribution Agent for Swedlife in the Arab world

This project is the largest project of its kind in Upper Egypt. But why Egypt? Researchers spent years trying to determine the most suitable location in the world and came up with Egypt, for the following reasons:

— The encouraging atmosphere for investment which provides investors with facilities is unprecedented in Egypt.

— The low cost of power required for the production of chemicals. The cost of power nears 50 per cent of the production cost.

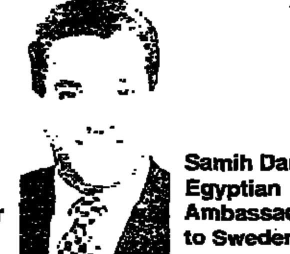
— The great potential for using by-products of this industry in agriculture. The by-products are met with great demand, particularly in Egypt.

This is in addition to the traditional factors that contribute to the success of any project, such as Egypt's strategic geographic location and low cost of manpower.

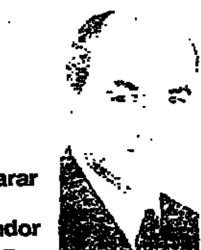


The complete line of Swedlife products

Hamdi Nada Foreign Minisrty Assistant and former Egyptian Ambassador to Sweden



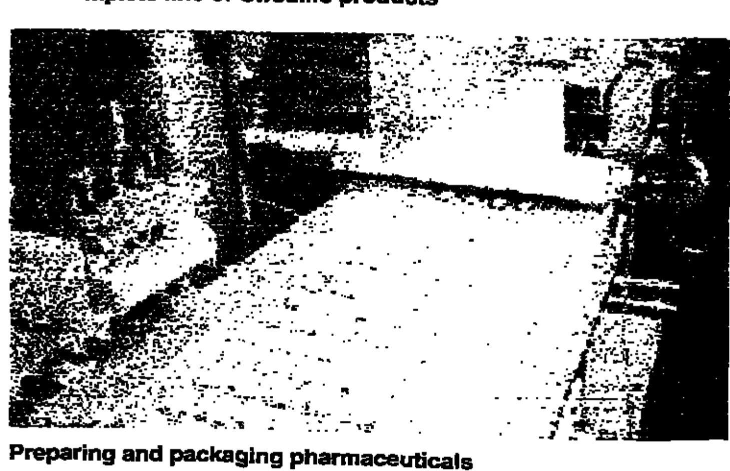
Samih Darar Egyptian Ambassador to Sweden



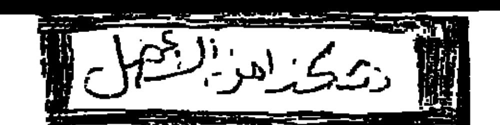
Ahmed El-Guweili Commercial Councellor

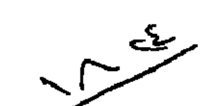
Refaat El-Sayed: "The encouragement from the Egyptian Embassy and the Commercial Office in Stockholm played a great part in my return to invest in Egypt. They also played a great role in seeing this project come to light."

The project will provide Egypt with the necessary materials to manufacture all kinds of pharmaceuticals for export



Preparing and packaging pharmaceuticals







Special supplement on Sweden to celebrate its National Day

Valen Export/Import congratulates the nation of Sweden, its government, people and King Carl Gustav on Swedish National Day

Speaking about Valen Export/Import, the company's manager Mustafa Abdel-Ghaffar, originally from Port Said, said: "I thank God, who granted me with success, that I have been able to obtain great trust from merchants and international companies and factories, whether in Asia, America, Europe or in Arab countries. We are currently make big preparations between Egyptian companies and Valen to import a large amount of agricultural products and equipment for Sweden."

Abdel-Ghaffar digressed, saying: "On this occasion I would like to thank President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak for issuing directives that remove all obstacles facing investors and exporters. Likewise, I wish to thank the Egyptian ambassador to Sweden and employees of the Egyptian Embassy for their assistance and understanding of all our requirements. We, the company, would also like to give special thanks to Ahmed El-Guweili, our business consultant in Sweden, who did not hesitate to give us his total effort in supporting us Egyptians who work in the field of commerce and who extended to us all his commercial advice."

Mustafa Abdel-Ghaffar provided assistance to the Egyptian handball team in the 1993 World Cup, and aided the Egyptian management, sports and press delegations as only a true patriot would do

Abdel-Ghaffar added that Valen is presently exporting Swedish and European products to many Arab countries, and that it is prepared to cooperate with companies wishing to import from any country in the world. He further stated: "It gives me pleasure to say that Valen is working for Egyptian-Swedish cooperative investment in the Arab Republic of Egypt. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate, in the name of Valen International Export and Import Co, Sweden, its people, government and King Carl Gustav on the occasion of Swedish National Day. Likewise, I would also like to send my heartfelt congratulations to the Swedish Company for Freight and Cargo Shipping."

Abdel-Ghaffar concluded his comments by expressing his thanks to the owner of Vallen Export/Import, Mr Klass Göran Olsson, and Mr Yrke Metyho.

Orascom and large-scale agriculture projects in Egypt

Orascom is considered one of the largest companies in the private sector in Egypt. It is involved in a wide variety of activities in different fields, from commerce, to industry and tourism. The company has taken a special interest in agricultural projects, providing the necessary materials for use in agricultural and land reclamation, such as horizontal and vertical pumps produced by the American company Aurora; electrical generators of all sizes produced by Volvo Penta of Sweden; Laurie Somier of France, in addition to digging and earth-moving equipment from John Deere of America, seeding equipment produced by Grove of Britain, and more.

In an interview with Eng. T Vam, general manager of the company's commercial department, he said that Orascom takes a great interest in major industrial and agricultural projects in Egypt, an interest that began with the company's agriculture projects in desert regions. It was over 15 years ago that the company first started importing diesel engines (Volvo Penta), deep-well pumps and electrical generators for the New Valley Governorate. Likewise, the company imported diesel motors and Swedish Volvo electrical generators for a number of agricultural projects in Egypt, especially for areas like the Western Desert and Uwainat near Egypt's southern border. The equipment used in these places were found to operate perfectly for many years, even in the most adverse weather conditions. It is truly the efficiency of Volvo electric generators which make them the best-selling in Egypt. Petroleum companies, the Suez Canal Authority, the Communications Authority, military production plants, factories and others have expressed their satisfaction with these generators.

Vam pointed out the importance of using original spare parts, saying that success of any kind comes from the equipment used. In a market where Volvo products are available, some have seized the opportunity to market non-original spare parts that damage the equipment and lead to numerous breakdowns, taking away the natural life of the machine. Orascom, on the other hand, provides original spare parts for all the equipment it imports, with the best possible prices and service to the customer.

Within this framework, the company is preparing to open a service centre in 6th of October City, to be added to the existing line of service centres providing the most modern and up-to-date service, located at Gisr Sues Street, the Cairo-Alexandria Desert Highway, and in the cities of Alexandria, Hurghada, Port Said and Al-Arish.

A quiet diplomat

Sherine Sadallah, second secretary at the Egyptian Embassy in Stockholm, Sweden.

Sherine Sadallah

BA in political science, 1988.
MA in accounting at Duke University, USA.
Member of the Diplomat's Association in Stockholm.

A noble man

Adel Misbah

Adel Misbah
BA in commerce 1972.
Veteran of the October War.
Traveled in 1975 to Libya with the Housing Ministry. Emigrated to Sweden in 1976, working a number of jobs in the field of clothing. Now owns a chain of stores in Sweden.

Whither the price of Swedish wood?

People in the Swedish timber industry are looking optimistic, and the market is expected to be flourishing with stockpiles depleting from the east to the west. We met the head representative of the Federation of Swedish Timber Exporters — the authority that oversees Swedish sawmill companies — who gave an interview with Ahmed Ezzat El-Dalash, which went as follows:

Why are Swedish sawmill companies so optimistic?

The year 1997 began well, and during the first three months we exported 4.2 million cubic metres, an increase of 300 thousand cubic metres over the previous year. Demand has increased at a steady rate, and in all markets, the prices increased by 30 per cent during this period. Likewise, the forthcoming period promises a further increase in prices.

Where are the main markets for Swedish wood?

Europe in general, with Germany, England and Denmark in particular, and likewise North Africa, Egypt, the Near East and Japan with a heavy share. There were many other countries that competed with Sweden for export. Russian exports to Europe, however, have nearly halted; Canada, for a time, was one of the largest exporters to Europe, but the American market cut off all the country's export for its own use.

Europe has therefore become our prime market, and we hope to render the competition to non-existence.

Most of the sawmills operate in two shifts, while the local market is weak. Is this not enough for the Swedish stockpile?

No. Because of the strong and increased demand from everywhere is the reason why the sawmills work two shifts but we still can't cover all our customers' demands. Since thirty years ago we have never ran out of stock from the inventories as is the case these days. Besides the economic situation is improving in Germany, and England, while Denmark has increased its demand for Swedish timber. Meanwhile, in the East, Japan has occupied an eminent place as an importer of Swedish timber, importing 400 thousand cubic metres in 1996. As for 1997, indicators are running high, and are expected to reach 700 thousand cubic metres.

Japan imports mainly whitewood. Will the price of whitewood increase?

The price of whitewood has increased dramatically, and most sawmills are working day and night to produce whitewood and take advantage of the increased price.

Egypt has been a major market for you in both good times and bad. What is your position with Egypt?

Egypt is of great importance to us, for when other markets decline, Egypt fills the vacuum created by this decline. It was noticed, however, that Egypt imported less than half of what it purchased during the same period in 1996. This means that the stockpile is weak.

What do you see for the future?

It appears that the winds are blowing in our favour, for our stockpiles are nearly empty; even the stockpiles in importing nations are low. Economic conditions are turning more favourable, and during the next few months we expect an increase in demand.

We must not forget that Swedish timber is still the highest quality in the world, and internationally favoured.

Money & Business

Non-farm payroll · Inflation · Dow Jones · GDP

Direct Cairo-Lisbon flight

DR MOHAMED Khairat, Egypt's ambassador to Portugal, received a delegation from both Elegant Voyage Co, an Egyptian tourist company, and Abreau, a Portuguese aviation company, in order to discuss the promotional campaign for the new Cairo-Lisbon-Cairo route, which will operate starting 15 July 1997, through Heliopolis Air Co.

The Egyptian ambassador will hold a reception party in Lisbon on 3 July 1997, which will be attended by high-ranking officials and leading Portuguese businessmen. An Egyptian delegation will also attend.

Banks federation seminar

THE ARAB Banks Federation held a seminar entitled Banking and Investment. The seminar was attended by a group of renowned bankers, mutual funds chairmen as well as a number of European experts.

The seminar, which is aimed at capitalising on foreign expertise in the banking sector, was opened by Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz, president of the Arab Banks Federation and Chairman of the National Bank of Egypt, who noted that the efforts exerted by the Arab Federation to develop Arab banking will result in fully-developing Arab economies.

Egyptian products exhibition in Portugal

Medhat Mansour, general manager of Pyramid Advertising Agency, organiser of Al-Ahram Egyptian Products Exhibition in Portugal, said steps are being taken to guarantee the success of transactions at the exhibition which will be sponsored by the Egyptian Embassy in Portugal, as well as the Commercial Representation Office.

It is worth noting the Portuguese market can absorb Egyptian products such as chemical products, fruits, vegetables, leather goods, Khan El-Khalili handicrafts, textiles, ready-made clothes, aluminium products, ceramic tiles, steel, carpets, furniture, electrical appliances, and more.

The cost to be paid for participating in the exhibition includes a 9sqm pavilion, plus the price of two return tickets, Cairo-Lisbon, and 10-day accommodation in a double room at a 4-star hotel.

The exhibition will also showcase some engineering projects and real estate investments.

Mansour added that the exhibition will certainly be the meeting place for Egyptian companies in a European country, as 85 exhibitors are expected to take part.

For further information contact: tel. 3391071, fax 3941866.

Trade fair in Oman

EGYPT will participate in the Muscat International Trade Fair, due to be held in Oman from 27-31 October. Egypt's participation in the exhibition comes within the framework of promoting friendly relations and implementing the Arab-Omani Joint Committee's recommendations to enhance trade relations between the countries. Minister of Supply and Foreign Trade Dr. Ahmed El-Guweili issued a decision to start preparatory procedures. Many Egyptian companies will display their products at the exhibition.

Faisal Islamic Bank continues to grow

IN ITS latest meeting on Sunday, 15 June 1997, Faisal Islamic Bank's board chaired by His Excellency Prince Mohamed Al-Faisal Al-Saud, reviewed the performance of the bank for the fiscal year ending 7 May 1997.

Al-Saud indicated that Faisal Bank is embarking on a policy geared towards boosting both economic and social development. This is being achieved through use of the savings in financing projects in various sectors. Priority is naturally given to national projects.

In the same context, H.E. Prince Al-Saud noted that Faisal Bank also establishes companies and provides support for those companies until they manage to achieve profits. Afterwards, the bank offers its shares of these companies for sale in order to set up additional companies.

Such companies include the Islamic Co for Acrylic Products, Farco, and Syltal Tenth of Ramadan for Medical Products.

This policy has resulted in the creation of about 9,000 job opportunities.

To support those falling in the low-income backed, Faisal Bank established the *Zakat* Fund. Through the increasing revenues of the fund Faisal Bank has managed to build housing projects for university students, clinics and charity organisations.

Al-Saud also noted that the *Zakat* Fund is keen to qualify *zakat* beneficiaries by teaching them crafts to secure their future.

Abdel-Hamid Moussa, governor of Faisal Bank, stated the growth achieved by the bank can be seen in the volume of transactions that rose from LE6176.7 million in the previous year to LE6439.2 million, achieving a 4.2 per cent increase.

Total revenues achieved totaled LE423.1 million, with an increase of LE55.5 million.



H.E. Prince Mohamed Al-Faisal — Abdel-Hamid Abu Moussa

Banque du Caire offers a comprehensive range of services for returning Egyptians

THE VARIOUS branches of Banque du Caire are taking the necessary preparations to welcome the return of Egyptians working abroad, in addition to their fellow Arabs, as it is customary of the bank to assist them in choosing the best means to invest their funds. The bank will also assist them in making their annual payments such as telephone, telex, fax, water and electricity bills, and insurance policies. The bank also leases safe-deposit boxes for customers to store their valuable jewellery and important documents. The bank's branches also deal in the exchange of foreign currency at the best rates, morning and night. Night banking services are currently avaiable at the bank's branches at Ramses, Giza, Talaat Harb, Mansoura, Nuweiba, Souq Nasr (Tanta) and Maamoura.

The General Securities Investment Association, in order to meet customer demand, now accepts request for housing reservations and selling and buying real estate by proxy, in order to facilitate customers in Gulf countries.

Bank du Caire has geared up its skilled staff at its branches in the UAE in Dubai, Al-Shariqa, and Ras Al-Kheima and Abu Dhabi, as well as its branch in Manama, Bahrain, to serve Egyptians working in these countries by receiving and transfering money by telex or fax 24 hours a day.

Traveller's cheques are likewise issued, which are guaranteed against loss or theft while on return. They can then be cashed immediately at any of the bank's branches throughout Egypt's governorates.

As part of raising standards in the level of services on a par with other banks worldwide, Banque du Caire has introduced new services, such as investment securities services, which allows customers to take part in investing in the blossoming stock exchange as well as night services at some of the bank's branches, ATMs which allow immediate cash withdrawals 24 hours a day and the bank's silver and gold Visa cards.









Special supplement on Denmark to celebrate its National Day

Egyptian ambassador to Denmark:

Denmark supports Egypt's international policy

On the occasion of this supplement, it is my pleasure to talk about Egyptian-Danish relations.

The role assumed by Denmark is a major one in contrast to the small size of Denmark. Denmark is a very active country in terms of its role as a member of the European Union and the *Nordic Cooperation Council*, as well as NATO.

Tarek Khalifa

Denmark has a very special place among countries of the north in particular, and among countries of western and central Europe in general.

Egyptian-Danish relations have been built on a strong foundation for cooperation in the political arena. Denmark helped organise a number of seminars for Egyptian and Israeli intellectuals, named the Egyptian-Israeli Dialogue. These *meetings resulted in the Copenhagen Declaration on 30* January 1997.

Denmark also took part in financing development projects in Egypt. The cooperative development programme will cost DKK200 million per year.

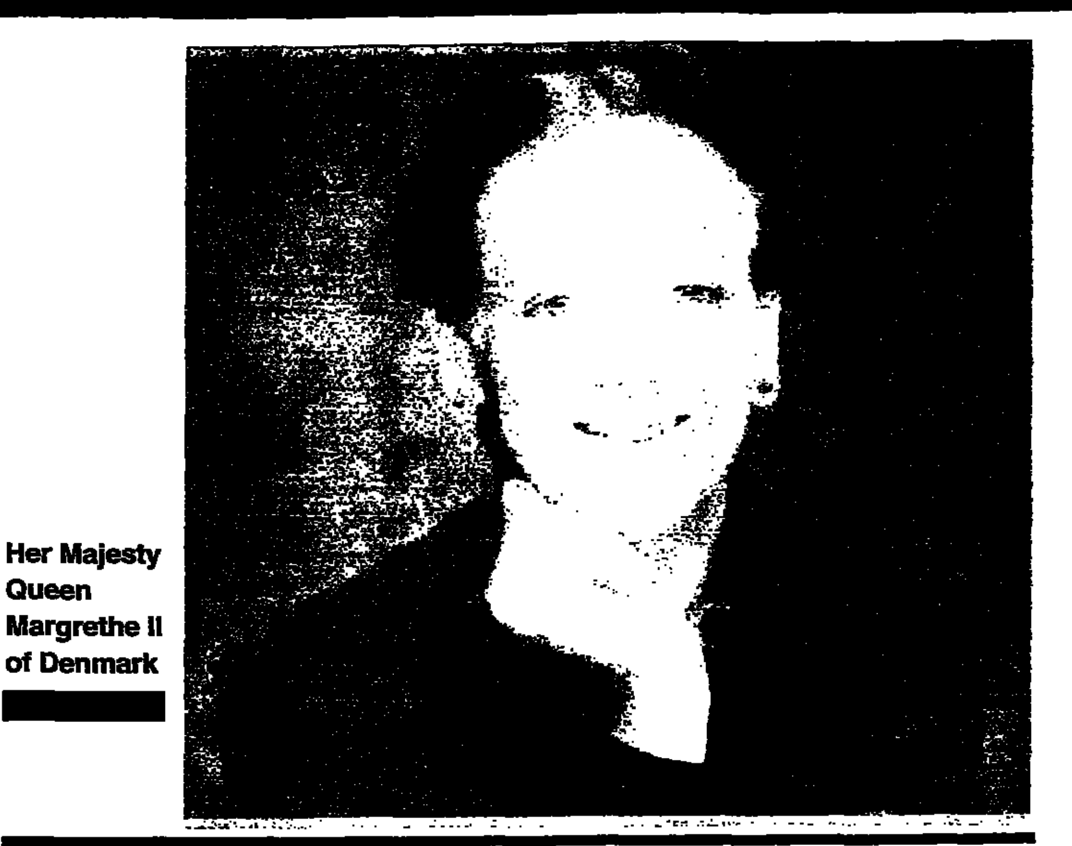
Danish grants are channelled through to projects in the areas of environment, sanitary water treatment, energy and desalination projects. Several delegations have recently visited Denmark to discuss how to engage in joint venture projects.

The editor-in-chief of the Middle East News Agency also visited Denmark, and met with officials of Ritswa, the Danish press agency.

To attract Danish capital to Egypt, a conference was organised to encourage investment in which a high-level delegation from the Egyptian Businessmen's Association took part. It is hoped that the anticipated visit of the Egyptian *minister of economy will result in boosting Danish in*vestment in Egypt.

Relations between the two countries are also flourishing in the areas of cultural exchange and tourism.

I end my statement by thanking the Danish government for supporting Egypt's international positions in issues of partenariat with the EU, trade liberalisation, and countering dumping allegations against Egyptian textile manufacturers.



Her Majesty Queen Margrethe II of Denmark

Copenhagen: **Mohamed Seif El-Yazal**

Statement by Mr Erling Harild Nielsen Ambassador of Denmark to Egypt

I appreciate very much the initiative of *Al-Ahram* newspaper in publishing a special supplement on Denmark on the occasion of Danish Constitution *Day and I am honoured to make a contribution.*

Let me, thus, take this opportunity to praise the warm and friendly Egyptian-Danish relations which have developed over the years.

Trade between Egypt and Denmark reached approximately LE500 million in 1996. Export from Egypt to Denmark consists mainly of fruits, vegetables, textiles and garments. Danish export to Egypt is concentrated on three product groups, i.e. machines and transport equipment, chemical and pharmaceutical products and foodstuffs of various kinds.

Danish enterprises have become internationally known for their expertise and technological *know-how* within various sectors, including the environment sector. In February 1997, a Danish *business delegation* visited Egypt in order to meet Egyptian businessmen and decision makers within this sector. The meeting showed a substantial mutual interest for further cooperation.

Upcoming Egyptian events such as HACE 97 and Arab Health 97 are likewise expected to attract Danish business delegations to Egypt.

Development cooperation is a strong feature in Egyptian-Danish relations and *has been so for many years.* Until 1989, assistance was provided in the form of soft loans and since then on grant basis only. Projects are concentrated in the fields of environment, new and renewable energy, water supply, water treatment and health.

Harild Nielsen

In 1996 a new programmme was introduced in Egypt: The Private Sector Development Programme. The aim of this programme *is to support, financially and in other* ways, Egyptian and Danish enterprises which are interested in establishing long-term cooperation in the form of joint venture, technology transfer, *management agreement or licence production.*

Since 1972 there has been an agreement between Egypt and Denmark on cultural, scientific and educational cooperation providing a framework for exchanges in the fields of scientific research, film and theatre festivals, art and architectural exhibitions as well as cooperation in the fields of sports.

It is my sincere hope that publishing this special supplement on Denmark will further add to the excellent relations between our two countries.

Danish-Egyptian ties remain close

Let me first express my appreciation to the editors of *Al-Ahram* for taking the initiative of publishing this supplement in order to promote Egyptian-Danish relations.

Last year, I had the pleasure of visiting Egypt in my present capacity as *development cooperation minister* in the Danish cabinet. The visit was a suitable occasion for a fruitful and productive discussion with a group of ministers.

I also had the opportunity to visit several projects that were *launched in Egypt with the support of Denmark.* Such projects as the 1965 project for treating children with hearing and speaking deficiencies. Other projects such as the sanitary drainage projects in Edfu. Until 1986 Denmark provided Egypt with long-term loans of Kr805 million. Denmark decided to write off half this amount in the Copenhagen Social Summit in 1995.

The ministry took a remarkable initiative to push forward development cooperation with Egypt, when Egypt was selected as one of the most favoured countries that have priority in receiving Danish loans. Egypt is expected to receive LE550 million from 1997-2001. These amounts will be provided in grants.



Statement by Poul Nielson *Minister for Developmental Cooperation*

*The new strategy of Den*mark is aimed at concentrating assistance to Egypt within the sectors of environmental protection, new and renewable energy and energy conservation.

The objectives of our development policy as an integral part of Danish foreign policy is the promotion of security, human rights, eradication of poverty, supporting democracy, and boosting economic and social development.

Denmark's support to Egypt will include building wheat stor*age facilities, and providing assistance to small-scale projects.* Cooperation will also entail sector programme assistance which will present a development strategy aimed at supporting a range of broadly-based activities in many sectors.

Let me end by expressing my appreciation of Egypt's role in supporting the peace process in the Middle East. Denmark fully supports Egypt's efforts to resolve the conflict in the area.

Novo Nordisk: 40 years in treating diabetes

Novo Nordisk is always keen to introduce the most recent innovations in the field of diabetes treatment. A few years *ago, Novo Nordisk introduced the Novopen 3, an insulin in*jection pen, which was highly recommended by diabetologists and physicians. Thousands of Egyptian diabetics were satisfied with using Novopen 3. Our prime objective is to upgrade the knowledge about diabetes through the educational offices of Novo Nordisk's training centres.

Novo Nordisk is determined on being the best in diabetes care, and is willing to serve all physicians who treat patients with diabetes.

Denmark in brief

If you look at the map you will find Denmark at the top of the continent of Europe, sticking out like a little hand and pointing towards Scandinavia.

Here is some information about Denmark, the country that deserves the word 'irresistible'.

Population: 5.2 million; the most densely populated country *in Northern Europe.*

Location: Situated in northern Europe between the North Sea and the Baltic, Denmark is the only Scandinavian country connected to the European mainland. The southern border of the Jutland Peninsula meets with Germany. Otherwise, Denmark consists of about 500 islands. The capital Copenhagen lies on Zealand, the largest island. The entire country is 43,000km in area, not including Greenland and the Faeroes Islands.

Climate: *Moderate in summer and very cold in winter.* Rainy year round.

Currency: The krona. One US dollar equals 6.5 Danish krona.

Language: Danish is the official language. Most Danish people speak fluent English.

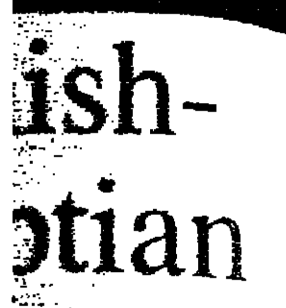
Measurement: Metric.

Working hours: 8.30am-4.30pm.

Time: One hour ahead of GMT.

Capital: Copenhagen.

Religion: Christianity (90 per cent Protestant).







Special supplement on Denmark to celebrate its National Day

Universal Trading: the best printing technology

Universal Trading is a major company working in the area of printing technology. Gaber Shueir, chairman of the company, emigrated to Denmark in 1973 where he established the Universal Trading Co specialised in supplying offset printing mechanisms of all types and sizes, particularly Heidel Berg, Muller, Sulna, Bolar, in addition to printing inks, films and other printing requirements.

Gaber Shueir

Shueir added that the company exports to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Turkey, China, Portugal and Poland.

The company also supplies its customers with spare parts and after-sale service.

The great challenge facing Egypt

By: Eng Hassan Nour El-Din, area manager for Krüger

In Egypt, fresh water resources — mainly the River Nile — are rather constant, while the water demands for agriculture, industrial and domestic purposes are increasing due to the increase of population and development.

The above is illustrated by the fact that by the beginning of this century, the yearly amount of fresh water per capita in Egypt was approximately 5,000 cubic metres; now it has dropped below 1,000 cubic metres.

Unless drastic measures and serious actions are taken to enhance the increasing water consumption, the water demands will exceed the resources within a few years. This will result in a major setback to the standard of living and development of Egypt and will ultimately be a threat to life in the country.

The great challenge facing Egypt now is to prevent this situation from happening.

The only way is to deploy all possible means to manage the available fresh water resources efficiently and to control the water consumption so that the available water satisfies the expected needs in the future.

In my opinion, these means include:

— Optimising the use of water for irrigation and industries by applying modern technologies, minimising losses and recycling the water to the maximum possible extent.

— Handling of potable water as a valuable object. In this regard privatisation of treatment and distribution facilities and relating the price per cubic metre to its actual cost are essential measures.

— Protecting Egypt's water resources against pollution by applying effective treatment to industrial and domestic waste waters.

— Issuing the relevant legislation to enforce the above measures and to ensure their continuous observance.

— Spreading public awareness of the seriousness of the situation and the importance of everyone's participation or contribution to overcome it.

I am confident that the Egyptian legislative and administrative authorities acknowledge the urgency of the situation and will provide the relevant allocations and take all the necessary measures to overcome this great challenge that faces Egypt.

Farewell party

Taher Khalifa, Egyptian ambassador to Denmark, hosted a farewell party for Second Secretary Khaled Dakrori, on the occasion of his forthcoming transfer to London. The party was attended by members of the Egyptian diplomatic corps in Copenhagen, as well as by staff of the Commercial Representation Office.

Khalid Dakrori

The female staff at the Egyptian Embassy in Denmark. In the centre is Ms Hoda Khalifa, wife of the Egyptian ambassador, at the Egyptian Day party at the International Women's Club, Copenhagen



EgyptAir sole carrier to fly between Egypt and Scandinavia



Mohamed Munir



Fahim Rayan

Mohamed Munir, general manager of EgyptAir, said that the airline is the only airline to fly between Egypt and Scandinavian countries. The flights began 30 years ago from Cairo to Copenhagen serving tourists.

EgyptAir uses the latest aircraft with outstanding on-board service. Training courses are provided in Europe for EgyptAir staff to keep abreast with the latest technology and developments in the field, Munir stated. This falls within the framework of the directives issued by Fahim Rayan, EgyptAir's chairman.



Unisas encouraging Egyptian exports

Eng Ahmed Shelbaia stated that his company, Unisas, is cooperating with the Danish Chamber of Commerce to promote Egyptian exports to Denmark, particularly in furniture. The chamber will provide Danish grants to improve the standard of Egyptian furniture to suit the Danish market.

The company held the Egyptian Furniture Exhibition in 1997 in Copenhagen. The exhibition gave access for Egyptian furniture exports with Europe and the United States.

Football player with an aspiration



James Eskander

James Eskander, born in Copenhagen in 1980, wishes, as every other football player, to join Al-Ahli Club.

James is an excellent defender, talented and stable. He plays tough when an attacker tries to pass through, and kicks strongly with his right foot.

He is a brilliant leader as well, and is very capable of manoeuvering. He is physically fit with a speedy response. He played 55 matches with the youth team in Denmark.

Suez Electronic Co: the bridge between Danish-Egyptian cooperation



Mahmood Farouk Zayd



Mustafa Mohamed Shahata

Suez Electronic Co was launched in 1976 as a joint venture between the Suez Canal Authority and the Salt Raido Holland BV Group, a Belgian-Dutch group that operates in the area of repairing and maintaining all telecommunication sets as well as navigational equipment. The company's branches, located in Suez, Alexandria, Port Said, Cairo and Aswan, provide field services for all vessels passing through the Suez Canal and at the Red Sea and Mediterranean ports.

Engineering a better environment

هندسة تحسين البيئة



Krüger is the leading Danish environmental engineering company with worldwide experience in the field of water supply, sanitation, treatment of domestic and industrial wastewater, solid waste management and biogas utilization.

Through subsidiaries Krüger offers its services either as consultant or as contractor. Also management, maintenance and training programmes for technical and managerial staff are offered.

Krüger maintains a high technical level by continuously developing its processes, systems and equipment. Most of Krüger's standard equipment is designed to allow for local manufacture and thus facilitate both transfer of technology and price savings.

كروجر هي الشركة الدنماركية الرائدة في هندسة البيئة التي تتمتع بخبرة عالمية واسعة في مجالات تنقية وامداد مياه الشرب، والصرف الصحي، معالجة مياه الصرف الصحي والصناعي، معالجة القمامة والنفايات الصلبة وكذلك استخدامات الغازات البيولوجية.

تقوم مجموعة كروجر من خلال شركاتها المختلفة بخدمات استشارية أو تنفيذ المشروعات كمقاولين، وكذلك تقدم كروجر خدماتها في مجالات التشغيل والصيانة بالاضافة الى برامج لتدريب الفنيين والعاملين.

وتحافظ كروجر على مستواها الفني المرتفع عن طريق التطوير المستمر لاساليبها التكنيكية و انظمتها و معداتها.

وتراعي كروجر في تصميم معداتها ان توفر امكانية تصنيعها محليا، مما يساعد على نقل التكنولوجيا وكذلك خفض التكلفة.

Krüger A/S
Gladsaxevej 363
DK-2860 Søborg • Denmark
Tel: +45 3969 0222
Fax: +45 3969 2392

Dana Projects
Box 118 Dokki
Giza
Tel: +202 3446 381
Fax: +202 3033 009





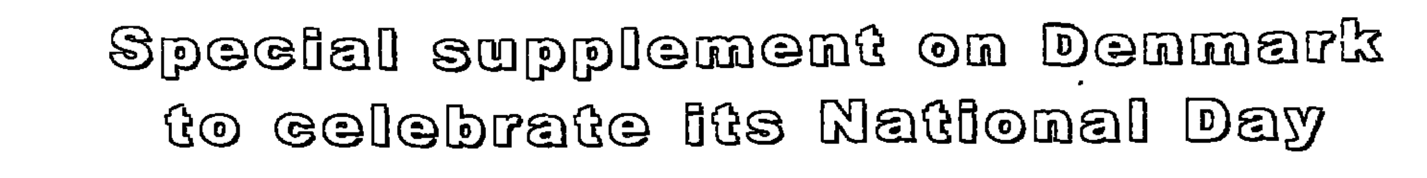
Bright examples in Denmark

Ahmed Assam
BSc in commerce in 1967. Started his career in the Ministry of Economy. He emigrated to Denmark in 1969 where he became the manager of Emi Import and Export Co.

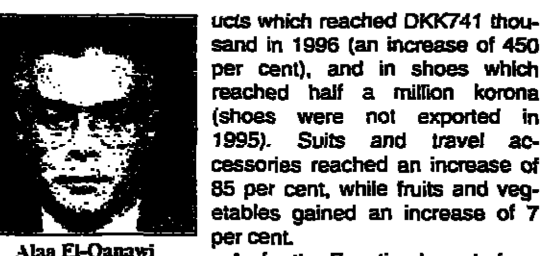
Tarek Refaat
BSc in commerce, 1966. Emigrated to Denmark in 1970. Manager of EgyptAir in Copenhagen.

Mohamed Darwish
One of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff. Joined the diplomatic corps in 1993. Stationed in Ghenia before moving to the diplomatic corps in Copenhagen.

Yasser Refaat
Emigrated to Denmark in 1992. Learned Danish and now works in the Commercial Office of the Egyptian Embassy.



Commercial and economic relations between Egypt and Denmark


Alaa El-Qanawi
Head of the Egyptian Commercial Representation Office

In the north-west of the European continent, lies Denmark, whose population is approximately 5.2 million. Denmark's economic rate has increased in 1996 and reached 2.2 per cent. There was also an increase reported in the same year in the family consumption rate which reached 2.4 per cent. The surplus of the balance sheet has also increased to reach DKK10.9 billion compared to a surplus of DKK9.4 billion in 1995.

Denmark is famous for applying the best national security systems in the area and for its high standard of services in health, education, transportation, and communication.

Denmark and Egypt have many economic and commercial accords; one of them is the cooperation treaty of 1977 between Egypt and the European Union which regulates commercial affairs. This treaty was followed by many other similar accords. In 1989 both countries signed many agreements the most important of which was the one on forbidding double taxation; another signed between the Egyptian Industrial Union and its Danish counterpart, and an agreement to form a cooperative association comprising of businessmen from both countries. In 1996, a treaty between Egypt and Denmark was signed which outlines the fundamentals and procedures of cooperation between the two countries in economic and technical affairs.

The rate of commercial exchange between Egypt and Denmark in 1996 has reached about DKK841 million. Part of the increase in the Danish commercial balance can be attributed to the Egyptian exports which reached the equivalent of DKK50 million in 1996 compared to DKK77 million in 1995. The decrease was caused mainly by the sharp reduction of Egyptian exports from cotton and textiles. Those two items alone were worth DKK11 million in 1996 compared to DKK36 million in 1995. The increase in the price of Egyptian textiles was the main reason why Danish companies ceased to import it.

The most important Egyptian exports to Denmark are ready-made clothes which are worth DKK21 million. Egyptian furniture recorded an increase of 350 per cent more than it did in 1995, as it reached DKK2.8 million in 1996. Other increases exist in the case of metal products which reached DKK741 thousand in 1996 (an increase of 450 per cent), and in shoes which reached half a million korona (shoes were not exported in 1995). Suits and travel accessories reached an increase of 85 per cent, while fruits and vegetables gained an increase of 7 per cent.

As for the Egyptian imports from Denmark, imported goods in 1996 were worth DKK791 million. The list of imported goods from Denmark to Egypt includes tools and equipment, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, foodstuffs like dairy products, especially feta cheese, dehydrated milk, and butter. The list also includes feed, medical equipment and raw materials. There is potential for expanding the kinds of Egyptian exports to Denmark especially in textiles, ready-made clothes, aluminium, furniture, canned food, beverages and leather.

In April 1997, Egypt participated in the African Commercial Week which was organised and sponsored by the Danish Chamber of Commerce and held from 8 to 10 April. The Danish Chamber is currently preparing Danish importers to come to Egypt and visit some interior design manufacturers.

In the field of economics, the Danish government has provided Egypt with development funds through DANIDA in the form of grants since 1969 until 1988 for an amount of DKK805 million. In 1996 this amount reached DKK170 million, and is expected to increase to DKK225 million in 1997 then to DKK240 million each year from 1998 to 2000. These Danish grants are used to finance major projects like building new sanitary systems in Upper Egypt, new power and energy projects, environmental projects, small projects, renovating wheat grinding mills, and also in financing health care projects.

Only recently, Denmark has decided to enroll Egypt among the countries benefiting from its program that encourages the private sector in commerce, investment, and services.

In the investment field, both countries have cooperated in various projects that reached 13 in June 1996 with a total capital of LE130 million, and a cost of LE304 million. The Danish contribution in those projects is LE81 million, an equivalent of 62 per cent.

Eskimo offers the latest refrigeration equipment



Mohamed Seif Nasr with German technician Mr Denzil

Mohamed Seif El-Nasr, manager of Eskimo, said in an interview that:

"Importing and marketing refrigeration parts and equipment requires top-notch expertise more than anything else.

"The expertise provided by Eskimo has continued since it was founded in the '60s, and has placed us at the forefront of companies operating in this field. Eskimo is considered one of the pioneering companies in the area of refrigeration, and holds a great stake importing company requirements in this field.

"Eskimo offers a number of products to the Egyptian market at competitive prices, including condenser units, thermostats and freon. We also provide free technical consultation and advice through our advanced computer system.

"Eskimo offers products from the best-known companies in the world, in addition to providing original spare parts. Custom orders can also be made."


Prime Minister Poul Neurob Rasmoush with Anan El-Galali during an official bisit to India


Queen of Denmark Margrethe II and her husband Prince Heurich with Anan El-Galali

Anan El-Galali: Helnan International now one of the largest hotel companies in the Middle East

Expansion into the Arab Gulf and East Asia lies in our future plans

Denmark is a country blessed by God for its natural beauty and charm. It is a kingdom that uses the most modern technology in its ample agricultural produce. Likewise, its developed industry places Denmark on a high position among most businessmen in the European market. Helnan International, headed by Egyptian businessman Anan El-Galali, with its headquarters in Denmark, centres its activities on hotel and tourist resort management. El-Galali's story is a story of the owner of one of Denmark's largest hotel companies, and how he established Helnan International to gain the trust of the people and government of Denmark.

It is worth mentioning that Anan El-Galali became a prominent and active person in Danish society, owing to his contributions to the hotel and tourism industry. Over the years, he has been a member of several official delegations headed by the queen and the prime minister.

During the official visit of Queen Margrethe II to Egypt in 1986, El-Galali was a member of the official delegation accompanying her. It was during this time that negotiations took place between the Danish Helnan Co and the Egyptian Hotel Co, the owner of the Shepheard Hotel in Cairo and the Palestine Hotel in Alexandria, to finalise the negotiations for managing and modernising the hotels. Thus began the activities of Helnan in Egypt, which occupied a prominent place in the area of developing and modernising public sector-owned hotels, and the privatisation of management.

Among the Helnan hotels found in Egypt include: Helnan Shepheard in Cairo, Helnan Palestine in Alexandria, Helnan Port Said, Helnan Regina in Hurghada, Helnan Marina and Helnan Cliff Top in Sharm El-Sheikh, Helnan Dahab, Helnan Nuweiba and Helnan Royal Beach in Ras Sedr.

Helnan Red Sea Palace in Jeddah: The true beginning of expansion in the Gulf

El-Galali explained that after facing international competition in hotel management from the likes of countries such as England, America and France, Helnan International Hotels won the rights to manage one of the largest hotels in Saudi Arabia, or rather, one of the largest hotels in the entire Arab Gulf, the Helnan Red Sea Palace in Jeddah. The hotel will not only provide top-of-the-line services to guests, but will also serve as an important locale for international conferences.

Helnan Red Sea Palace is considered the real beginning of future expansion, not only in Saudi Arabia, but throughout the Arab Gulf region as well.

Helnan International and the tourism market in East Asia

El-Galali said that a delegation of Helnan executives will accompany him to East Asia to make preparations for the hotel's future expansion in certain countries of the region.

Diplomats in Denmark

Magda Nasr, plenipotentiary minister at the Egyptian Embassy in Copenhagen, graduated from the Faculty of Economics and Political Science. She is married to Ambassador Nasr Mahdi. Nasr has worked in the general council of the ministry in international cooperative administration and economics. She is now second secretary for Egyptian embassies in Denmark.

Magda Nasr

Ashraf Abdel-Qader Salam joined the Foreign Service in 1987. Worked in the Egyptian Embassy in Jordan, then in the administration of international organisations, including the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, the Non-Aligned Movememt, and in International economic relations. Under-secretary at the Egyptian Embassy in Denmark since 1996.


Ashraf Abdel-Qader

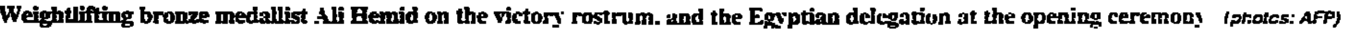
Mohamed Mustafa Abdel-Gawad works in the administrative and financial affairs section at the Egyptian Embassy in Copenhagen. He graduated from the Faculty of Law, Ain Shams University in 1965.

Mohamed Abdel-Gawad

Egyptian glitter at Bari

At the Mediterranean Games in Italy, the Egyptian athletes snatched a number of medals and the world's attention. Abeer Anwar reports





Weightlifting bronze medallist Ali Hemid on the victory rostrum, and the Egyptian delegation at the opening ceremony *(photos: AFP)*

A crowd of 70,000 gathered to watch the three-hour opening ceremony of the Mediterranean Games held in Bari, southern Italy this week. A number of singers, including Greece's Demis Roussos, took part in the parade. Ali Ibrahim, Egypt's rowing champion, was the Egyptian flag bearer leading the country's athletes.

Egypt's first medals were in weightlifting where Ali Hemid won two bronze medals in the 54kg category, the first by snatching 135kg. In the jerk, Hemid was able to carry 135kg, coming third but breaking his own previous best to set a new African record.

In the 59kg category, Mohamed Osman won two medals. He came third in the snatch with 115kg after Greece's Leonidas Sabanis and Turkey's Sedat Artuc. In the jerk he beat the Turkish competitor and came second to Sabanis, the world champion in this weight. In the 64kg category, Yousry Shalaly lost first place to Turkey's world champion, Hafuiz Suleymanoglu but won the silver after snatching 132.5kg.

In the 70kg category, Ahmed Hashem, Egypt's champion, came third in the jerk carrying 170kg. In the 76kg event, Ra'fat Eissawy lost the gold medal to Greece's Victor Mitrou and took silver with 177.5kg, beating his Turkish competitor, Mehmet Yilmaz.

"Eissawy could have easily won the gold medals because both the Greek and Turkish players were suffering from injured arm muscles but his achievement is still a good one," commented Gamil Hanna, head of the weightlifting federation.

In the 83kg category, Nasser Adel was able to win the bronze, snatching 155kg. Nasser Helal won the bronze in the 91kg category, lifting 155kg.

In the Graeco-Roman wrestling, Karam Mohamed won the bronze in the 76kg category.

As for swimming, Egypt's sole representative, Rania Elwani, won a gold medal in the 100m freestyle for the first time in Egypt's history in the Mediterranean Games in swimming, breaking the previous record of 57.09 seconds, held by France's Catherine Plewinski, by finishing in 56.79 seconds. Spain's Caludia Franco came second in 56.97 seconds and her teammate Solenne Figues came third in 57.12. Elwani was able to collect her second gold in the 50m freestyle, breaking the 26-minute barrier to set a new Mediterranean record of 25.90. Metka Sparavec of Spain came second and Spain's Claudia Franco was third. Elwani continued her success by winning a third medal (silver) in the 200m freestyle event in 2.03 minutes. This record places Elwani among the eight top swimmers in the world.

In rowing, Ali Ibrahim, Egypt's champion who came second in the World Cup two weeks ago, was able to win the silver medal, losing the gold by one minute to Slovenian champion, Izoc Cop.

Although the players were pleased with their achievements, complaints of chaos abound. The Egyptian and Arab delegations threatened to boycott the games because of the lack of organisation and transportation. Journalists also complained that the system for relaying results was unreliable and that press centres lacked international phones.

The reported chaos could threaten Rome's bid to host the 2004 Olympics. "Organisational flaws in Bari could seriously harm Rome's bid for 2004," the head of the Italian National Olympic Committee said.

Déjà vu in Al-Ahram two

Ahmed Barada may not have won the Al-Ahram squash title, but he did manage to send Rodney Eyles of Australia back down under. Eman Abdel-Moeti reports on the closing matches of the tournament

Egypt's dream of walking away with the title in the second Al-Ahram International Squash Championship was not to be realised this year. Its young hopeful, world number five Ahmed Barada, fell to Scotland's Peter Nicol in the semi-finals, not only losing the match 1-3, but also his chance to dethrone Pakistan's Janshir Khan, ranked number one in the world.

The tournament, however, was not a total loss for Barada. Although he did not make it into the finals, his long-awaited re-match against Australia's Rodney Eyles was, perhaps, one of the most gripping and intense matches of the competition.

Ahmed Barada's stoical expression offered little insight into the tension he must have felt before his quarterfinals match against Eyles, ranked number two. It was the Australian, after all, who seemed to stand in Barada's way to knocking Khan off his throne.

But for Eyles, the match was undoubtedly a chance to reap havoc on the young Egyptian who, when ranked number 37 last year, in the tradition of Egyptian hospitality, gave the Australian a thorough 3-0 thrashing in the first Al-Ahram International Squash Championship. To put it mildly, Barada was not on Eyles "most favourite person to send a Christmas card to" list.

This year, in the quarterfinals match held earlier this week, Barada did little to improve his image in Eyles' eyes. The Australian, hell bent on revenge, was again proffered a plate full of humble pie, and was forced to swallow a 1-3 loss to the young "Pharaoh".

Although touted as a unique tournament due to its 5,000 year-old backdrop, the real excitement was to be found in the glass court, where Barada and Eyles engaged in what can probably be best described as a human cockfight with squash racquets. Barada not only had the home court advantage, but also a raucous chorus of nearly 3,000 fans cheering him on. A roaring crowd whenever Barada scored a point, the spectators became eerily taciturn at those times when Eyles pulled ahead, wreaking havoc with the Australian's concentration, and little in the way of improving his disposition.

Well into the fourth and final match, with Eyles claiming the first game a 15-12 win in his favour, and Barada winning the next two, 15-8, 15-12, etiquette and sportsmanship went over the side of the court. Eyles' barely restrained temper flared in the form of an "if looks could kill" kind-of-glance directed at the spectators. And Barada, for his efforts, received a conduct warning for wasting time, before claiming the game and match with a 15-9 win.

"Both players played well," said Nasser Zahran, the referee of the match who was accused by the fans of being biased in Eyles' favour. "The rough play was to be expected given that both men were obsessed with winning the match."

Zahran was later exonerated of the allegations by International Referee Jack Flynn. "I think the referee did an excellent job," stated Flynn.

"It was a tough game, but in the end, I think that the best player won," commented Flynn after the match. "Barada really did deserve to win."

In other squash action, Janshir Khan was, as usual, in the limelight. After trouncing France's Julian Bonetat 3-0 in the first round, Khan gave England's Paul Johnson a second round 3-0 defeat, just so that he wouldn't feel left out. He then finished off Johnson's world number seven ranked teammate Simon Parke, 3-1 in the semi-finals.

If Barada's star was destined to shine through to the semi-finals, the other Egyptians competing were not so lucky. Amr Shabana made it through the qualifying rounds, but lost in the main draw to Dan Jenson, 0-3. Mohamed Morsi, who found his way into the tournament via a wild card, lost in the first round to England's Del Harris, ranked number eight. Amir Wagih defeated England's world number 11 Mark Cairns, 3-0, but lost to Simon Parke, 3-0.

The prize for the most disappointing and frustrating match of the tournament, however, goes to Omar El-Brollossy and Australia's Brett Martin, ranked number 10 in the world. El-Brollossy, who gave an all-out performance, lost the match 2-3 by the skin of his teeth.



Barada and Eyles, a portrait of two rivals *photo: Amr Gamal*

In the women's event, Sarah Fitzgerald, a recent inductee into the ranks of the top players, gave a stellar performance in all her matches. Fitzgerald won her first round match against world number 10 Claire Nitch of South Africa, then defeated world number six Suzanne Horner 3-0 in the quarterfinals. Her winning streak continued into the semi-finals, where she pushed past Carol Owens to claim a 3-0 victory.

Also putting on a strong performance in the women's competition was Michelle Martin of Australia, ranked number two in the world. Martin defeated South Africa's Natalie Grainer, ranked number 20, 3-1, then made little of England's Jane Martin, ranked number 13 in the world, to claim a 3-0 win. In the semi-finals, she beat Sabine Schoene of Germany, ranked number eight, for a 3-0 victory.

None of the Egyptian women made it past the qualifying rounds, including May Hegazi, who received a wild card. Hegazi lost 0-3 to world number three Cassie Jackson.

The 2nd Al-Ahram International Squash Championship was sponsored by:
Milkana
Hyundai
Forte Grande Hotel
Baraka
ICC
Egyptian British Bank
Twingo

Squash mania: Quiet please!

It's official: Egyptian squash fans are probably the most emotional squash fans in the world. Eman Abdel-Moeti observes spectator behaviour

In the first Al-Ahram International Squash Championship last year, all but one of the Egyptian players lost in the first round of the main draw, and no one expected Barada to beat Rodney Eyles in the quarter-final. However, fans attended all his matches and in the quarter-final you couldn't move an inch, with 2,500 spectators packing into stands built to accommodate a mere 2,000. Every point Barada scored was greeted with thunderous applause, and the referee had a hard time keeping order. It was even harder this year, especially since Barada is now number five in the world.

For everyone who attended the championship, whether player, referee, or official from the World Squash Federation (WSF) or Professional Squash Association (PSA), all agreed they have never seen such an emotional audience anywhere else in the world. Carol Ownes, the number five seed said, "I've seen a similar crowd in Spain but still they weren't so enthusiastic."

Jack Herrick, chairman of the board of the PSA said, "Squash spectators in other championships are usually reserved, but I think the Egyptian fans are as exciting as the tournament itself. The air is electric, the play is world-class and the whole atmosphere is one of anticipation." Herrick also said that because of Ahmed Barada's high world ranking, the element of national pride spurs on the Egyptian fans, and added "I think it's better to have the crowd involved in the match rather than just sitting there. Emotion is a tribute to the Egyptian fans."

People suspected that Barada might repeat last year's victories, but when he beat Eyles for the second time, twice the number that attended his match in the quarter-final came to the semi-final to cheer him against fourth-ranking Peter Nicol. Of all ages and from all sections of society, they could barely contain their excitement, and the referee pleaded with them many times to control themselves and wait until the ball was played before shouting out, so as not to put the players off.

Perhaps one of the matches most affected by the spectators was Omar El-Brolosy's match against Brett Martin; Brolosy was leading by two games and was winning the third, when a fan shouted out before Martin had finished his move, and although it was obvious he wasn't going to reach the ball, the referee was forced to rule a let ball and stop the game because of the fan's scream.

For the other players coming to play in Egypt, Egyptian fans may be a blessing if the two contenders are foreign; but if one of the players is Egyptian, it's quite a different story. Commenting on the Egyptian fans' behaviour and its effect on players, Simon Parke said, "Playing before Egyptian fans is not scary, but sometimes difficult, because they want the other player to win, so you have to learn to forget about the crowd and play your own game to win."

For Chris Walker, ranked six in the world, having the host country's spectators supporting their players is to be expected. He said the same thing happens in his native England, where the fans cheer the English only, and added, "maybe not quite as ferociously (as the Egyptians), but that is what adds to the event and makes it exciting. I find it motivating to have all the fans cheering for the other guy, it motivates you to get stuck in and try harder."

Last year when Robert Edwards, the PSA official tournament presenter, attended the Al-Ahram Championship, he commented that Ahmed Barada was inspired to win by the crowd. Barada did admit that there are players he never can beat except in championships held in Egypt.

This year, each time Barada walked off the court victorious, he would address the crowd saying, "I have only won because of you."

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Al-Ahram Weekly

19 - 25 June 1997

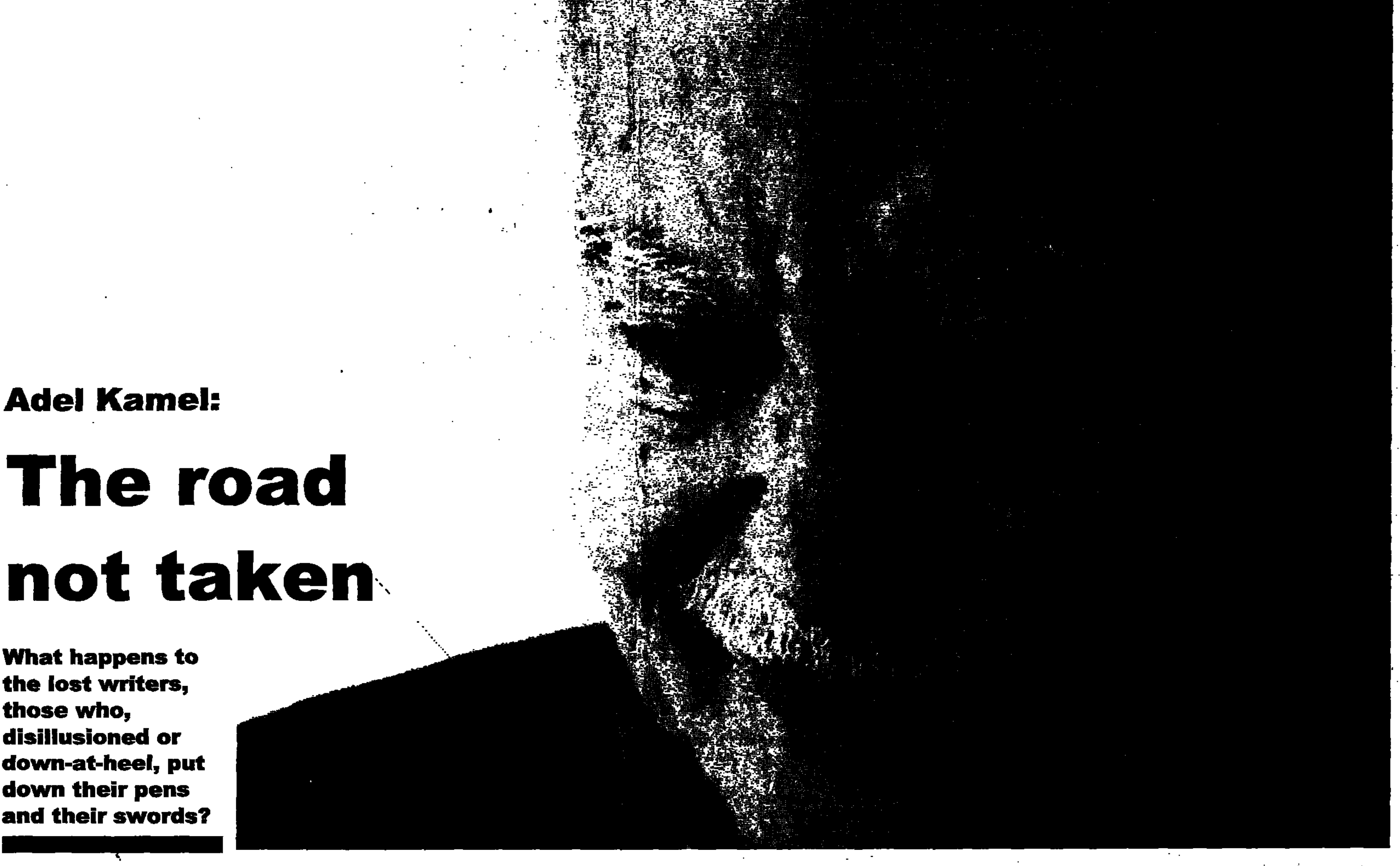


photo: Sherif Sonbol

Adel Kamel:

The road not taken

What happens to the lost writers, those who, disillusioned or down-at-heel, put down their pens and their swords?

He is one of the pioneers of Arabic fiction, born and bred in the first half of the twentieth century. If his name is not always mentioned in the same breath as those of Yehya Haqqi and Naguib Mahfouz, it is because Kamel took a sharp turn in the mid-'40s, having decided never to write again. He was done with *belles lettres*, disillusioned with the future of writers. In an interview I conducted with him in 1959, he explained his decision: "In my country, the word can never be a sword... no writer can make a living out of writing novels or producing any other form of literature, whether he is a free writer or not, whether or not he sells his pen to whoever pays. Few are ready to pay the price, at any rate, and the price is not worth it." In a daring statement for a man of his generation, he also based his renunciation on the decision that his only link with Arab culture was the Arabic language.

Kamel was a profuse writer of novels and short stories during the '30s. Unable to find a publisher, he published one of his novels at his own expense in the '40s. Among his published works are *Malik Min Sho'au* (King of Light) and *Millim El-Akbar* (Millim the Great). His unpublished works include two short novels, two plays and *five short stories*. His best-known short story, *Dabab Wa Ramad* (Fog and Ashes), steeped in the atmosphere of the age, was published in *El-Muqtataf* in the '30s.

His withdrawal from writing, when it came, was abrupt and dramatic. The pages of *Millim El-Akbar* served as a platform from which he voiced his dissatisfaction with and rebellion against the Arab Language Academy. The Academy had failed to reward him for his masterpiece, instead offering the coveted award to *Lalqita*, a romantic novel, written in rhythmic prose by a new writer at the time, Mohamed Abdel-Halim Abdallah. The Academy had also failed to acknowledge Mahfouz's novel *El-Sarab* (The Mirage). Kamel's manifesto was met with a violent response, and remains a landmark in the history of literary criticism.

Having quit writing, Kamel turned wholeheartedly to the practice of law. He threw himself into a career with the determination of a disillusioned lover. He became a successful legal adviser and lawyer to scores of artists at home and abroad. But he never forgot Naguib Mahfouz, who at the time was a clerc at the Ministry of *Awqaf* (Religious Endowments). Kamel introduced Mahfouz to his friends in the cinema industry and encouraged him to write film scripts. This not only helped Mahfouz make ends meet every month, but also introduced him to a whole new world — not the popular, poor, crowded *districts he had known* all his life, but the world that is Cairo at night, a world in which Mahfouz seemed a novice.

Kamel and Mahfouz have remained intimate friends all their lives. Kamel *introduced* Mahfouz to El-Harafish, the close-knit group of intellectuals and artists which has met regularly every Thursday night for years.

Mahfouz's esteem for Kamel's literary talent, honesty and critical ability is such that, until recently, the Nobel laureate gave each of his works to Kamel to read, savour and comment on before sending the manuscript to the publishers. Kamel once said that he was happy to have been able to salvage Mahfouz's talent, if not his own.

In 1959, however, Kamel became dissatisfied with his sudden divorce from fiction. He tried to go back to writing, producing several chapters of a novel called *El-Da'ira El-Mashouma* (The Ill-Fated Circle), which he never got around to finishing. He immediately realised that a drastic change had taken place: the vanguard, progressive writer he once was had been transformed, giving way to a romantic writer, while Mahfouz had moved ahead. He decided to abandon writing again. Mahfouz's success was a great source of satisfaction to Kamel, who may have felt that his friend's accomplishments were his own.

Rummaging about among old papers, a few years ago, *Kamel found some of his works* which had not been published. Under pressure from El-Harafish, and especially from his friend *Gamil Shafik, Kamel published two short novels: El-Hall Wal-Rabt* (Untying and Tying) and *Munawashat Alal-Hudud* (Skirmish at the Borders). Both were published by Dar El-Hilal in *1993. Among his papers, he found another five* short stories which had never seen the light. He also found a short story which Ahmed Mazhar, the icon of post-1952 Egyptian cinema and a member of the Harafish, reviewed in a feature published in *El-Hilal*. Two of Kamel's plays await only a daring publisher.

The road Kamel took — and the path he abandoned — are in many ways emblematic of the destiny of the other lost writers. Salvaging his works would allow us to piece together the often choppy course of 20th century Egyptian fiction, and to establish a link with the writers who stopped writing, in disgust or despair. Many remain trapped within the relatively restricted framework of periodicals, never to appear in their own right on bookshelves, whether because their work demanded too much courage from readers and publishers alike, or because life and its material exigencies required a shift in career.

Kamel was born in Abbasiya in 1916, and graduated from the Faculty of Law in 1936. He started writing stories as a student, but was not *published* until 1943. *When* Egyptian-owned and -run enterprises were established after the Tripartite Aggression, Kamel set up a knitwear venture. *But he has since abandoned his law practice and his manufacturing enterprise* and now spends his time between Cairo and the United States, where his three daughters live. *Whenever he is in Cairo, however, he never* fails to drop in on Yehya El-Rakhawi on Thursday evening, to ask about the Harafish, tell them his latest *jokes*, and to hear theirs...

In his introduction to two of Kamel's novels published by El-Hilal, Mahfouz wrote: "Adel is one of the most distinguished figures in the avant-garde generation of story writers. Before us, he took the initiative of publishing his works at his own expense... afterwards, he became disillusioned with the role of literature and realised the futility of creativity... if we had fallen under the influence of his thinking, we would all have abandoned writing as he has abandoned it... As a colleague, I have great respect for him, and he is one of my dearest friends. Since I came to know him in 1943, we have been ardent friends."

Munawashat Alal-Hudud (Skirmish on the Borders) ends with the words: "Time alone is the Kingdom, O you who are the king."

These words are the nightingale's song in Egyptian folklore. But are the words also a reflection of Kamel's disappearance, some fifty years ago?

Profile by **Soliman Fayyad**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris



♣ Sometimes I like to do some serious reading (not very often, though, don't fear), and when I do, well the book had better be worth it. The one I just finished, *Ana wal Nissa'* (The Women and I) was one of those rare finds: a book you don't regret having abandoned your best friends for. **Kamel Zoheiry** has drawn on his vast cultural, artistic and linguistic background to thoroughly analyse the gentler sex. I won't say more, dears, but if I were you I wouldn't miss this little tome for the world.

clockwise: Zoheiry's latest book; Bahgory's London exhibition; Inas Mazhar in Japan

♠ My good friend **George Bahgory** has done it again with a much acclaimed exhibition in London. Dear George! He will never stop surprising his friends. Faux-naif, witty caricatures are his best-known works, but the better-initiated among us also know that George excels at more sophisticated oils. I have been bowled over by his virtuosity on more than one occasion, and I am sure that George will stun me once again. In fact, I *am so excited about this particular* exhibition that I feel I shall miss the Changing of the Guards...

♥ Let us face it, some of us are more sports-inclined than others and, although I am definitely one of the others, I don't mind cheering on my more muscular friends, especially if I can do it from the comfort of my own home. One such friend is our own **Inas Mazhar**, who has just become a member of the prestigious Handball Special Commission of the Association Internationale de la Presse Sportive for four whole years. This felicitous event took place in Kumamoto, Japan, where she was covering the Men's Handball Championship. And guess what? Inas is the first woman to become a member of this association. When she called with the news, all I could say was hip, hip, hurray.

